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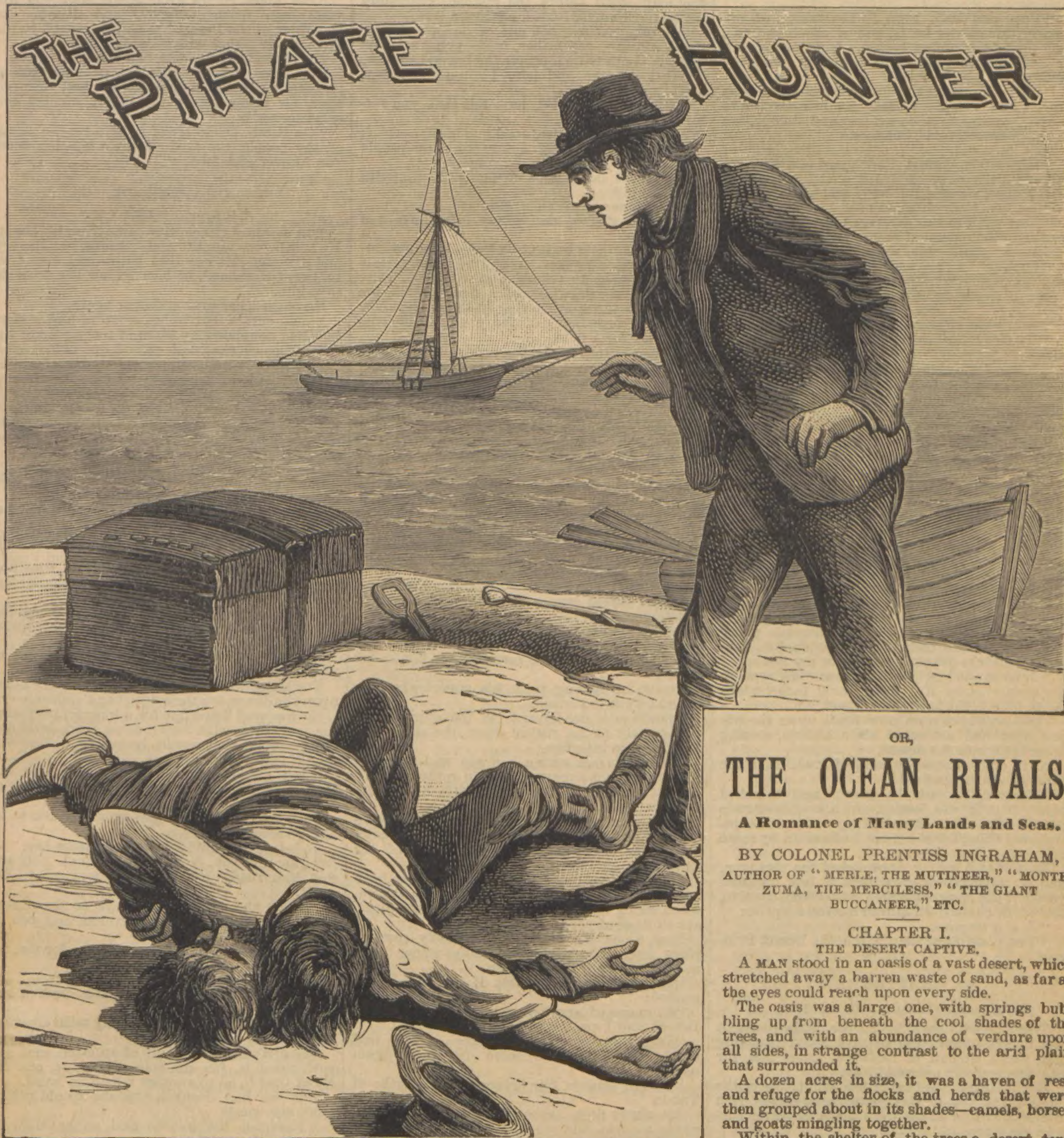
Vol. XXXVIII.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., March 7, 1888.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 489



IT WAS AN APPALLING SIGHT TO THE TREASURE-SEEKER.

OR, THE OCEAN RIVALS.

A Romance of Many Lands and Seas.

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AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "THE GIANT
BUCCANEER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DESERT CAPTIVE.

A MAN stood in an oasis of a vast desert, which stretched away a barren waste of sand, as far as the eyes could reach upon every side.

The oasis was a large one, with springs bubbling up from beneath the cool shades of the trees, and with an abundance of verdure upon all sides, in strange contrast to the arid plain that surrounded it.

A dozen acres in size, it was a haven of rest and refuge for the flocks and herds that were then grouped about in its shades—camels, horses and goats mingling together.

Within the shelter of the trees a desert tent had been pitched, and beneath this there was a

Moorish saddle and bridle, a blanket or two, several cooking utensils and some skins for holding water.

A long lance was lying near it, and leaning against a small tree was a Turkish musket, with a belt of ammunition hanging over the muzzle.

The man stood in front of this tent, and his eyes were gazing out over the desert, though he seemed not to behold any object, so deep were his meditations.

He was a man of fine physique, straight as an arrow, and dressed in the garb of the Moors, and his costume, though worn was clean and his appearance indicated that he was not one who belonged to that country.

A dark face, burned brown by long exposure to the heated winds of the desert, it was yet the face of one born far away from that wild land of the Moor.

His features were handsome, stamped with intelligence, and refinement, and yet upon them rested a look of firm resolve, one that was almost desperate.

He stood in an easy attitude, with arms folded upon his broad breast, and his manner that of a man whose time hung heavily upon his hands.

Not another human being was in sight, and, but for the camels, horses and goats, the scene would have been one of utter loneliness.

Presently his lips parted and he spoke in a deep, musical voice and in the Spanish tongue, while he gave utterance to his thoughts aloud, as though he was not fearful of being overheard.

"And must this life go on forever? Will there be no escape from it? Is this life? Is it not a mere existence? I live, yes; eat, drink, sleep, and that is about all.

"Now and then I go to the camps of my master, for master he is, and a cruel one, too, and then I see human beings. But they are not fellow beings, for, what have they in sympathy with me?

"There is one that I thought would be good to me, and yet, since that one owes one life to me, it seems, like the creditor and debtor, we are no longer friends, but foes.

"So let it be!

"Here am I, Rafael Rodriguez, one time an officer in the navy of Spain, a Cuban planter, with riches, a beautiful wife and child, now a captive to a Moorish master!

"Here am I in this desert, as surely buried as were I in a dungeon of Moro Castle.

"My wife and child were taken from me, or rather they were rescued from the hands of that monster, Belmont, the Buccaneer, while I, in irons, on a sinking vessel, was left to drift on to my fate.

"And what a fate!

"My God! for twelve long years how have I suffered?

"I am to-day, in brain, in body, a stronger, a better man, for the years that have fallen upon me have not made me a wreck, as I feared the bodily and mental anguish I have suffered would do.

"Here I am, a keeper of a Moorish master's herds in this desert, and with no chance of escape.

"Each time that I have tried, my plot has been foiled, and I have been brought back to a worse punishment in the indignities and the drudgery heaped upon me.

"Well, I must exist on, for somehow I have hope that one day I will leave this desert scene, one day behold my native land of Cuba and fold in my arms those I so fondly loved.

"And how strong this hope is upon me to-day—ha! I see a horseman approaching—it is not yet time for my master to order me away from here to the oases to the south, for grass and shrubs are yet plenty here for my flocks.

"Who can it be? Doubtless some spy sent by my master to see if I have dared face certain death by a flight across the desert."

The man's eyes were now fixed upon the object that had attracted his attention, coming from far across the desert.

As it drew nearer it shaped itself into the form of a horse and rider.

Taking up his gun the desert captive looked to see that it was loaded, and a couple of rude pistols were also examined, for it was no unfrequent thing for a herder to be slain by some robber and his cattle run off.

Nearer and nearer approached the stranger, and, as the horse drew within a few hundred yards of the oasis, in which stood the captive, the words came from him in intense surprise:

"It is a woman.

"Yes, none other than Ritah, the Desert Princess."

CHAPTER II.

A DAUGHTER OF THE DESERT.

THE one who approached the little island in the desert, where the captive stood awaiting her, was a woman, or rather a young girl, for she was scarcely over eighteen.

Her costume was that of the wild tribes of the Moors, and yet it was picturesque and of rich material, while there were gems upon the turban she wore.

Her face was not as dark as the complexion of

her race, and gave the belief that she was not a full-blooded Moor.

With a form that was graceful and a face that was certainly handsome, she was an attractive personage, and the captive bent low before her as she rode up to where he stood.

Her horse was a long-bodied sinewy animal, and showed both speed and endurance, while he was carapised with all the extravagant show that the dwellers in the desert love to put upon the animals they ride.

"Has the Daughter of the Desert, the beautiful Ritah, Princess of the Desert, lost her way among the sands, that she comes to this far-off oasis?"

The captive spoke in a low tone and in the language of the Moor.

So perfectly did he speak that a Moor would never have suspected him of being other than one of his own people.

"I have come, Nerok the Stranger, to see you," was the reply of the maiden, and she sprung from her saddle, and, at a motion of her hand the captive led away her horse and took off his saddle and bridle, leaving the faithful animal to seek food and water at will.

"I am ready to bear the commands of the Daughter of the Desert," said the captive, and he placed a meal of coarse food before the maiden, who had seated herself upon the ground near the tent.

"I have food and wine with me for my wants, Nerok, and it has not been long since I broke my fast, as it was at the oasis three leagues to the south of here.

"I wish to talk with you, Nerok."

"You have but to speak, and I obey," and the man stood before the maiden, gracefully leaning, with arms folded, against a tree.

"Nerok, you are not one of our people, for Sheik Hassah, my father, holds you captive?"

"Yes, I am from a people far beyond the sea. There I was free, and here I am a slave," was the bitter response.

"I know that, and I have felt that you suffered."

"Can it be otherwise, good maiden?"

"No, and yet were I far from my people with one I loved I would be content."

"It might be so with me, good Ritah, with one I loved."

"You love not me then, Nerok?"

The man started and gazed into the face of the maiden.

Since she was a little child he had known her, and he had ever been most kind to her, while she had seemed to regard him with friendship.

She was the daughter of a desert sheik, the ruler of a large wandering tribe, and he knew that there were many of the young sheiks who sought her for a wife.

She had beauty above the order of the desert maidens of her race, and greater intelligence.

Her mother had been an English woman, a captive of the sheik, one whom he had purchased from a corsair, as he had also purchased the man who was called Nerok.

That Ritah should tell her love to him startled the man, for he knew what her people would think if she dared be even kind to him.

He had, one day, while searching for a fertile oasis to which to drive his herd, discerned a horseman bearing a captive with him, bound to him, as she was seated behind him.

He had ridden into the oasis and there threatened the captive with instant death unless she vowed by Allah to become his wife.

The desert captive saw that the man who made the threat was a sheik, young, powerful and vicious.

He saw that the one he threatened was Ritah, the daughter of his master, and he knew that she hated and feared the one who had her in his power.

And so he sprung from his covert where he lay and went to her aid.

There was a deadly look in the eyes of the young sheik as he rushed upon the slave who had dared to interfere.

But he was met with a courage and strength that he had not expected, and in a moment lay dead at the feet of the man whom he had despised as a slave.

Back to her father had the Christian captive taken Ritah, and he had, in gratitude, been made the chief herder of the flocks of his master.

But from that day Ritah seemed to have been less kind to him, for she had not, as before, when seeing him the same kind word and pleasant smile as of yore.

Now, alone she came to his lonely resting-place, long leagues from the camps of her tribe, and asked him if he loved her.

In response to her question if he loved her he replied:

"I am one of another race, Daughter of the Desert, and I am thy father's slave."

"In my far-away home I have a wife and child, and I long to some day meet them again."

"I have spoken, fair princess of the tribe of Tabor."

An angry flush appeared upon the dark face of the maiden, and she said:

"If to gain thy pardon, would you take me

with you to thy own land and make me thy wife?"

"I have said that I have a wife, fair Ritah, and far from thy people thou would'st but wilt like a flower and die."

"Nerok."

"Yes."

"I owe to you my life, and I love you."

"You have refused my love, but I have a heart and I know that you pine in sorrow far from your land and people."

"Sheik Luka has asked my father for my hand."

"His reply was that if he aided him to overthrow the robber tribes of Zoberg, he should marry me."

"Sheik Luka has gotten his desert horsemen together, and, with my father they have you to make war upon the robber Zobergs."

"It was then that I came to seek you."

"My faithful Melok follows with a camel bearing food and clothing, with gold and all that we need."

"I came on to talk with you first."

"If you will fly with me we can go when Melok comes."

"If you refuse, then I will return to my father's camp and become the wife of Sheik Luka."

"And you, Nerok, can go alone."

"The camel is one from the coast, and he is the fleetest of his kind and can endure more than any other among our people."

"Give him his will and he will go back to the coast, and once there you are free, for you speak our tongue as one of our tribe, you look, in our garb, as one of our people."

"See, there comes good Melok, and you are your own master, Nerok, and Ritah, the Daughter of the Desert has paid her debt to the slave of her father who saved her life."

The attitude of the man had changed.

He no longer stood with arms folded leaning gracefully against a tree, for he had dropped upon his knees before the desert maiden and cried earnestly:

"Oh Ritah, Daughter of the Moors, the Allah of thy people, the God of the Christian bless you forever and forever!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FUGITIVE.

THE words of the captive came from his heart. He saw before him life and burdens, not slavery and despair. He saw that Ritah had been true to her womanhood, had given up her love to save him.

He blessed her over and over again.

Blows, curses, hardships, sorrows and sufferings had not shown an atom of feeling upon his stern face as time had passed on; but now he was almost wholly unnerved. His features writhed with emotion, and his face flushed and paled by turns. His form trembled and he felt that he must be calm. His far-away home, his wife, his child, his freedom, all came before him now, and he seemed strong enough to fight a host, rather than sink back into despair.

The desert girl watched him closely.

She loved him, and yet she knew that it would be death did her father know that she did.

He was a stranger among her people, a slave, a Christian, and more he was of a hated race.

But she loved him, and she was determined to set him free.

The man, Melok, a faithful fellow who had been her attendant from girlhood, was now close at hand.

He had obeyed his mistress's bidding and followed her to the desert oasis, where the captive could be found.

He had with him a couple of horses, one of which he rode, and a camel.

The latter was one of a herd that were noted upon the desert for their speed and endurance.

He was well fitted out for a long journey over the arid plains with water, skins, food, dates and other things that would be needed to one who sought safety in flight.

Ritah had hoped to go with the captive, but that she had given up, when he had told her he loved another.

Then the heart of the girl prompted her to let him go alone.

To return the kindness he had shown her.

"There, Nerok, is your camel, and you will find him ready for the long journey to the coast."

"Melok and myself will return to the camps, that our absence be not discovered, and you go your way."

"Melok, saddle my horse at once for me, for we return."

The Moor bowed, and obeyed in silence.

While he was gone, neither the captive nor Ritah spoke.

The man's brain was whirling with emotion, and joy was paramount.

The girl's heart was full of emotion, and sorrow ruled it, for she was giving up one she loved, and to go to another whom he loved.

But she had decided, and she would not retract her words.

"Farewell, Nerok," she said, as the Moor returned with her horse.

He took her hand, bent low over it and kissed it.

"Thank you, and may Allah's blessings rest upon you," he said.

She made no reply, but waved her hand and sprang into her saddle.

Then she said:

"Delay not, for your camel is fresh.

"Danger besets your path, but I leave you with Allah.

"Farewell, Nerok."

Then she spoke to her horse and he bounded away.

Melok followed, leading the other animal, and Rafael Rodriguez stood gazing after them as they went at a gallop over the desert.

Then, as they grew lesser and lesser in the distance, he turned and looked about him.

The splendid camel left to him was cropping grass near by, and, making him kneel, the captive searched his pack to see just what he had.

There was the costume of a camel-driver and another of a sheik.

Then there was a gun, a pair of pistols and plenty of food and water for himself and the noble brute that was to bear him away to freedom.

The sun was setting now, and so he decided to start upon his way.

A hasty glance about his camp, the securing of his own weapons with those brought to him, and he mounted the camel and turned his head toward the coast.

"Farewell to the life of a slave.

"Farewell, my dumb companions, and a sad farewell, for in your companionship I have found my only comfort."

He waved his hand to the herd, who, hearing his voice, looked up at him.

Waving his hand, he started on his long journey.

The noble animal that he rode he knew must be his guide, and he did not doubt his capability to carry him unerringly to the coast.

On over the darkening desert he rode, and thus on through the night.

The camel never faltered, but held on his way as though a beaten trail lay before him.

The sun was just rising when he came to a desert well, surrounded by a score of date trees.

There was no indication that it had been lately visited, and so the fugitive from a desert master halted there for the day.

The water was not bad, there was good cropping for the camel, and shade from the burning sun.

With the approach of night he was again on his way.

And thus the long, desolate, dreary flight was kept up, until at last the fugitive came upon a caravan going into the city on the coast.

No one doubted his being one of their people, and to those he joined he said that he was from the far desert tribes going into the town to purchase captives for the Sheik Luka.

He knew well the customs of the people, their prayers and all, and right earnestly did he pray with the faithful when the time came for devotions.

Arriving in the city, he put up at a reputable place, for he had found a bag of gold among the effects on the camel to pay his way.

Ritah had provided it, and though there was not a large sum, there was ample for his needs.

His camel brought him a fair price, and then he sought a passage upon a Moorish vessel trading in the Mediterranean.

From port to port he went, until at last he reached Constantinople, and from thence shipped for a port on the coast of Spain.

Six months after having waved a farewell to his herds in the desert oasis, he was on a vessel as a common seaman, bound for Havana.

The past he remembered as a hideous nightmare, while the future was as a bright dream in anticipation.

But man is unable to read what fate has in store for him, and so it was with Rafael Rodriguez, for twelve long years a wanderer, and a slave to a Moorish master.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN.

A HORSEMAN was riding slowly along a highway in the island of Cuba, one pleasant afternoon some six months after the flight of the desert captive from the cruel servitude under his Moorish master.

Though no longer in the garb in which we beheld him in the oasis in the desert, the reader cannot fail to notice the same fine form and striking face in the horseman, for it is Rafael Rodriguez who has at last reached his native land and is hastening on to his home by the sea.

The highway borders the sea, and ever and anon a fine view of the coast and the ocean is spread out before the gaze of the horseman.

The horse seems tired, for he has been hard pressed, and the rider wears a look of commingled hope and dread.

As he rides on, with his home lying but a short distance before him, his thoughts revert to the past.

He remembers the beautiful maiden who dwelt with her father in the plantation home to which he is making his way.

He recalls how she won his love and became his wife; but he recalls that a vessel, supposed to be a cruiser, picked up a drifting boat at sea, with the woman of his love, her father and others in it, the remains of a wrecked vessel, and that he who was so good to them proved to be Belmont the Buccaneer.

The maiden became the wife of Rafael Rodriguez, but her steps were dogged by the pirate, and he was driven to seek a home in Havana, where his wife would not be in dread of being kidnapped.

He remembers his duel with the buccaneer, which so nearly cost him his life, he recalls how they were going to Havana, his wife, his child, himself and his servants, on their plantation yacht, when they were captured by Belmont.

He was put in irons, a battle was fought with an American cruiser, the buccaneer was almost wrecked, the chief captured, and the crew deserted the sinking ship in a storm, leaving him chained in the hold.

His wrecked craft was driven upon an island, and after a long while he freed himself of his irons, and left the isle to drift about the seas and foreign lands, driven by cruel fate until he was captured by an Algerine corsair, forced to serve her chief, and then sold to a desert sheik.

And his wife and child?

He knew that an American cruiser had saved them from the power of the buccaneer, but more he did not know.

Returning to Havana, he had hastily sought a few old friends, but they were not readily found and so he mounted a horse and wended his way toward his plantation home, for there, if alive, they must be.

With these thoughts surging through his brain Rafael Rodriguez rode on.

As he drew near the villa he could not ride at a slow pace, and driving spurs deep into the sides of his tired horse, he dashed on.

The drive-way was weed-grown, and there was an air of neglect upon all.

The mansion appeared in sight, and a glance told him that it was deserted.

As he rode toward it, now allowing his horse to walk, for he feared the worst, he saw a man standing by a rustic arbor gazing out upon the sea.

The man was dressed in white, wore a palm-etto straw hat, and was evidently a native.

He called to him and the man started, glanced at him, and then came forward quickly.

"It is Cespedes, my old overseer.

"Now I will know all," came through the closed teeth of the Cuban.

"The Virgin be praised! it is you, Senor Rodriguez?"

"I know you, though much changed you are," and Cespedes grasped the hands of the Cuban as he sprang from his horse and met him.

But Rafael Rodriguez could utter no word.

His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and his eyes were turned with silent appeal upon the face of the overseer.

"I see, you are too much moved, senor, to speak.

"Let me tell you all, tell you that the old mansion has been going to ruin this many a long day, for your wife sold it, and the buyer went to the bad and I bought it.

"I live in the wing yonder, and have half a dozen slaves only, and they work for me, as I have enough laid by to support me well. Ah! but the senora, I see your eyes ask about?"

"Great God, yes! my wife! my child! what of them?"

The words came almost fiercely from the lips of the man.

"The senora came here, senor, after your death, for you were believed to have gone down in irons in the hull of the pirate craft, and she lived here for more than a year, I believe.

"One day a vessel came here, an armed vessel, and the senora and the dear little senorita left in it, for, as I have said, your wife had disposed of the plantation."

"A vessel came, an armed vessel?" hoarsely asked Rodriguez.

"Yes, senor."

"It was the buccaneer, and—"

"No, senor, Belmont the Buccaneer was hanged, I should have told you, by the officer who rescued your wife and child, and he it was who took them away."

"They went where, good Cespedes?"

"God knows, senor, only the senora said that she would go away from Cuba to find a home, as you were at the bottom of the sea."

"I must find them, Cespedes," quickly said the Cuban.

"Ah, senor, that was some twelve years or more ago."

"I care not if it was fifty, for find them I will."

"But alas! how, senor?"

"I will seek them from one end of the earth to the other, good Cespedes."

"Ah, senor, it will take gold, and the senora disposed of your property, for you remember you were believed to be dead."

"I remember, and, Cespedes, I come back a poor man.

"I have but a hundred pesos to my name.

"Ah! what shall I do, what shall I do?"

"Senor, I have a few thousand pesos, and they are yours, for all I have made I owe to you.

"I own this place, it is true, but it is almost a ruin now, and yet with the few slaves I have I can get support.

"Senor, I will work hard, for you as well as myself, in our old age, and you can have the three thousand pesos I have in bank in Havana."

"My good, very noble Cespedes, I would not rob you; but I will take a loan from you, and in a few days start upon my search for my wife.

"If I find her, she will be rich, for she has my wealth and her own, you remember.

"But I am tired, good Cespedes, so you will give me shelter and food, and we will talk over what is best to be done."

"Yes, senor, and I would hear from your lips the story of your life in the years that have passed away."

"I will tell you all, Cespedes, all, and a long, sad, utterly cruel story it is to tell.

"But, let us go into the house, for—"

He stopped suddenly, a wild shriek broke from his lips; he tried to speak, and then, reeling, fell heavily upon the ground ere Cespedes could catch him in his arms.

CHAPTER V.

A PIRATE'S TREASURE.

THE wild cry, breaking so unexpectedly from the lips of the returned wanderer, was heard by the few negroes belonging upon the plantation, and they hastened to the spot, believing that some harm had befallen their master.

They came running from the garden, the stables or kitchen, wherever they happened to be, and were soon upon the spot.

In a word, Cespedes told them that it was their former master, come back as from the grave, and he was borne into the mansion and placed upon a bed.

Then he opened his eyes and sat up, as the overseer made efforts to restore him, and after glancing about him for a moment in a bewildered way, he said:

"It was joy, Cespedes, joy that caused me to swoon away, for I felt myself swooning away."

Cespedes shook his head sadly. He feared that grief had turned the head of the senor.

"I know what you think, Cespedes; you deem my mind wandering; but, it is not so—oh, no! and I will prove it this night.

"But now, let me speak to those dear old people who once called me master.

"Ah! how I shudder at the name of master, for I, too, have been a slave, my good friends, and before long I shall buy you from the senor here and set you free.

"Yes, set you free, for I know what it is to live in slavery, though your servitude is not a bitter one, oh, no, nothing such as mine was," and he grasped the hands of the old negroes, while Cespedes again shook his head, for in his own mind he believed that the Senor Rafael Rodriguez had gone mad.

The negroes then hastened off to make all comfortable for their old master, and to talk in wonder at his return, as from the grave, while a hearty supper was also prepared.

Telling Cespedes that he wished to collect his thoughts, and would go alone upon the grounds overlooking the sea, Rafael Rodriguez strolled out of the mansion, one wing of which the overseer made his home.

His face wore a bright, hopeful expression, and it seemed that his thoughts were no longer full of bitterness and sorrow, as when he had arrived.

Something had suddenly driven from him all thoughts of a bitter nature, it seemed, and when he returned, with a quick, elastic step, and cheery manner, the overseer was more than ever convinced that he had gone mad.

But he entered into the spirit of the senor, and the two had a most tempting supper together, washed down by some rare old wine which Cespedes had been made a present of by Senor Rodriguez when she had departed on the American cruiser.

After the meal was over, the servants had departed, and the two were seated together, making fragrant cigarritos, Rafael Rodriguez said:

"Cespedes, my dear old friend, I can see that you deem me mad.

"There is no need of denying it, that you think so, nor any wonder that you do, for the change from grief to joy came in a flash.

"But I have reason for my joy, and you shall know it, and share the pleasure with me."

He spoke with intense excitement, and Cespedes still deemed that he had lost his mind, but remained silent to hear what else he would have to say.

"You remember when we left here, good Cespedes, to go to Havana, and thus be free of the persecutions of Belmont the Buccaneer?"

"I recall it but too well, and I have heard all from the lips of the senora, and thus it was I deemed you dead, as others did, for it was said

that the pirate schooner sunk with you in the hold in irons."

"She did not sink, for I am here, Cespedes; but her crew believed that she would go down in the storm, and deserted her, leaving me to my fate."

"She drifted about and one night in a fierce gale drove upon an island, lodging high up on the rocks."

"The shock split the timber to which I was chained, thus freeing the ring-bolt, and I made my way out of the hold and after days filed off my irons."

"I was alone on an island almost barren; but I had plenty of stores, as you may know, and I carried them ashore."

"The schooner was a total wreck, and I felt that another storm from the same quarter would break her to pieces."

"Now to the joy that overcame me, for in the cabin beneath the flooring, I found the *hiding-place of the buccaneer's treasure*."

"Oh, senor!"

"Yes, and it was a vast fortune indeed, in gold, silver, jewels, and jewelry."

"I understand, senor, I understand," and Senor Cespedes began to feel that after all Rafael Rodriguez had not gone mad.

"I took that treasure to my island camp and hid it away."

"Then, as I had expected, a severe storm broke up the schooner and I gathered the wreckage, and with tools, which were in plenty, began to build a vessel."

"I had to dam up a little inlet, to lay my keel in, and so it took me over a year to get my craft ready for sea."

"But how you must have worked and suffered, senor."

"Ah, Cespedes, no one can ever know."

"But I at last got all ready, and taking my provisions and treasure on board, I stood out to sea, from the lee of the breakwater which I had also to build to get an anchorage for my boat."

"I sailed about for a long time without seeing a sail, and one night a storm came up, my vessel began to leak, almost go to pieces, for you know I had to build her as best I could under the circumstances, and I drove hard upon a barren island."

"The little sloop was a total wreck, but my skiff I managed to save, and burying my treasure on the island, I put off from the place, for I had little food."

"After several days I was picked up half-dead by a vessel bound to China, and I lay for weeks in delirium."

"On our arrival in China, I sought to work my way home, and was captured on a British brig by an Algerine corsair, and was forced to serve him for some time, when I was sold to a Moorish sheik as a slave, and you can never know the misery I endured for the long years I was in the desert, and only six months ago I made my escape."

"In all my sufferings I had actually forgotten the existence of that treasure; but it came across my memory like a flash, Cespedes, just as we were talking of my needing gold to help me in my search for my wife."

"That is why I fainted from excess of joy, Cespedes, and now I am a rich man, yes, very, very rich, for the pirate's treasure is a vast fortune, indeed," and as he ceased speaking Cespedes sprang forward and grasped his hand in enthusiastic congratulation at the good fortune that had befallen him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TREASURE-HUNTERS.

AFTER having rejoiced together over the fact that Rafael Rodriguez had recalled to mind the treasure on the island, the face of Cespedes suddenly grew very anxious as he asked:

"But, senor, do you think you can find the island?"

The face of Rodriguez darkened. It was a question that troubled him.

After a moment he said:

"Yes, I must find it; but, to tell the truth, I know not just where it lies."

"I was wrecked upon one of the Bahamas, where the schooner went to pieces, and I sailed from it in the sloop."

"I saw other islands while on my cruise, and was driven upon one of them in the sloop, but, as I left it in my little skiff, drifted about for several days, and was picked up in a half-dazed condition, I am not just sure where the island lies."

"But I must find it, senor."

"Yes, by all means; but how, senor?"

"Well, I will get a little money from you, charter a small fishing craft, with say three men, and go in search of it."

"It is the very course to pursue, senor; but I am sorry that I am not a sailor, so cannot accompany you."

"I regret it also, Cespedes; but I recall that it makes you deathly sick to go upon the water."

"It does, senor; but you must be careful about the men you take."

"True, for it will be a temptation to them to

get rid of me and take the treasure to themselves."

Then they talked together until a plan was formed between them, and it was decided that Rafael Rodriguez should go to Havana the next day and there secure a small coasting craft and a crew of three men, telling them that he was going to an island to get the bones of one who had been buried there where a wreck had occurred years before.

So to Havana Rafael Rodriguez went, and a suitable craft was found with three men whom he picked out as honest tars.

Cespedes had accompanied him to Havana, and his gold was readily paid out for all expenses of charter, wages and stores, and he bade Rodriguez farewell and saw him set sail upon his search for the Treasure Island.

Having drawn his own conclusions, as to the latitude and longitude of the island in which the pirate schooner had been wrecked, Rodriguez decided to first seek to find it, and from there start forth to search for the one on which his little vessel had been cast.

Feeling sure that it was one of the Bahamas, he shaped his course for Great Abaco, and after a rapid run came in sight of the Hole in the Wall.

From that point the search was begun, the men reporting every island that came in sight, and Rodriguez regarding each one attentively to note any familiar point.

He had promised a handsome bonus to the one who discovered the island, and so the men were constantly on the watch.

By night the little craft would be anchored, so that all hands were on duty by day.

Island after island was sighted, gazed at by Rodriguez and passed by.

Thus days passed away when one afternoon an island was visible upon which the Cuban gazed long and earnestly.

He kept his glass at his eye and as the sloop drew nearer cried out:

"We have found it!"

"That is the island."

Taking the helm himself he ran the sloop in behind the reef, upon which he had years before thrown stones to serve as a breakwater, and then both anchors were let go, for the night was coming on stormy and wild.

The little topmast was hoisted, the bowsprit run in and all was made shipshape, for there was a dread of the island in the heart of Rafael Rodriguez which he could not shake off.

The long time he had passed there, building his little vessel from the wreckage of the pirate schooner, caused him to fear that a cruel fate might still be dogging his steps.

But though the seas ran fearfully high and dashed with savage roar against the island, and the decks of the sloop were swept all the time by breakers, the anchors held fast and the day dawned with no harm done to the vessel.

Soon after the sea ran down and Rafael Rodriguez went ashore in the little boat belonging to the sloop.

What conflicting emotions swept over him as he visited his old camp, beheld the little inlet where he had built his sloop, and recalled the days of toil and nights of woe he had passed there.

But Fate seemed not unkind to him, as he had found the island, and he hoped that the one in which was buried the treasure of Belmont, the Buccaneer, would also be found.

Going on board the sloop once more, he took the helm and stood out from under the lee of the breakwater.

He recalled just how he had laid his course over thirteen years before, and followed as nearly as possible on that course.

Night came, and the sloop was anchored; but with the dawn she was put upon her course.

Thus the days passed until one morning an island was sighted, and the cry that broke from the lips of Rafael Rodriguez told them that it was the one he sought.

It was a barren spot, rocky, sandy and forbidding; but Rafael Rodriguez seemed to feel sure that it was the island he was searching for, and as he sailed around it there was a small wreck visible upon the shore.

"That is the little craft I built, and which was driven ashore there that night of the storm."

"Yes, there is no mistake, for that is the island the treasure lies buried in."

He had muttered these words, so that the crew did not hear what he said; but their eyes were upon him, and the cry of joy that he had given upon recognizing the island, had caused them to begin to think for themselves and to talk together.

"Juan, didn't the senor show a great deal of joy for just finding the resting-place of dry bones?" asked one.

"For a fact he did, Ravel; but he said the body lying there was one who had been very dear to him."

"Yes; but why should he spend so much gold to dig up bones and carry them back to Cuba with him?"

"I don't know."

"I guess they are not bones, Ravel."

"What do you mean, Juan?"

"I guess Juan thinks as I do, Ravel," said the third seaman, whose name was Josepha.

"And how do you think, Josepha?" asked Juan.

"I guess when those bones are found they will be yellow."

"With age?"

"No, with gold."

"Ah!"

The exclamation came from the other two.

Josepha had made a good suggestion.

"I tell you, mates," he went on to say, "this craft was not chartered, in my mind, to hunt for human bones."

"We were not shipped for a cruise to take back the ashes of dead folks, and my idea is that the captain knows there is a treasure buried on yonder island, and is going there to get it."

"That he has got a coffin to bring the dead home in, does not prove that he will put dry bones in it."

"But wait and see."

"And if it is not a dead body, mates?"

"Well, we will know just what it is, and if it proves as I suspect it will, we can decide what is best to be done," was the significant answer of Josepha.

CHAPTER VII.

A CRIME FOR GOLD.

THE three men whom Rafael Rodriguez had shipped to aid him in sailing the little sloop in the search for the Treasure Island were unknown to him; other than that, they had been recommended as good and honest sailors.

He had told them of the object of the voyage, as stated, that it was to find and bring back the remains of a dear kinsman, to be buried upon Cuban soil.

He had seen no reason for the men to doubt him, and their actions on the cruise had not shown that they did so.

Still he was suspicious and upon his guard.

Remembering that there was a comparatively safe anchorage on the south shore of the island, opposite to where his sloop had driven on the night of storm, he headed for it, and the craft soon lay snugly at anchor.

The sun was yet an hour high, and so he said:

"I'll do nothing to-night, lads, but go ashore and locate the spot where I buried my friend."

"Yes, senor," replied Josepha, and the little boat was lowered from the stern davits and he took the oars.

"I will row myself ashore, Josepha, so you remain and get the sloop ready to receive the remains, and have the coffin on deck."

Josepha frowned, but a warning look from Juan caused him to at once get out of the boat, and Rafael Rodriguez entered it.

Taking the oars, he sent the boat shoreward at a rapid pace and soon ran out upon the sands. Quietly he walked around the beach until he came to the wreck of his little vessel.

It was fast going to decay, and the wash of the seas, in severe storms were continually hitting it severe blows.

From the wreck he struck off into the interior of the island, and after some difficulty found the exact spot where he had buried the treasure.

He dug down with a spade which he had brought, and soon the iron struck a hard substance.

"Yes, it is the oaken treasure-box."

"I am now a rich man," and his voice quivered as he uttered the words.

A little more digging and the top of a box, iron-ribbed, was seen.

Then the gold-hunter took the dimensions of the box and said:

"Yes, it will fit into the coffin."

"But I must put it there myself, and make it secure with sand, for those men must not know that it is treasure."

As he spoke he raised his eyes accidentally and started at what he beheld.

"Ha! there is one in the top watching me."

"They doubtless suspect that I am deceiving them, so I must be very careful."

He did not appear as though he had discovered the man up in the rigging of the sloop, but threw in the earth again and started back to the beach, for the sun had gone down.

Returning to his boat he rowed back to the sloop and said:

"Lads, I found the grave, and the body is there, so we can get it to-morrow."

"I am glad, senor, for you have gone to much trouble and expense from the love you bore your kinsman."

"Were there many wrecked in the sloop, sir, with you?"

"No, only a few of us; but the one whose body I have come after died and was buried here, while the rest of us departed from the island in a skiff belonging to the sloop, and were picked up at sea."

"You must indeed love your friend's memory most dearly, Senor Captain," Juan said.

"I do; but I'll have supper now and then turn in, for we must get away to-morrow."

So Rafael Rodriguez ate his supper and then

turned in, while the crew sat smoking upon deck, and had taken their seats forward as though to be out of ear-shot of the cabin.

But the Cuban did not turn in, as he had said, for a good night's rest, for he slipped out of his bunk almost immediately and creeping through the gangway into the hold took up his place just by the forward hatch, which had been opened when the coffin was taken out and placed on deck.

Josepha was speaking when he reached his hiding-place, and was saying, in a low, guarded tone, but which reached the ears of Rafael Rodriguez:

"I tell you, mates, it is treasure, not bones that he has come after, and we must force him to divide it equally in four parts."

"So I say, Josepha," said Juan.

"If he refuses?" asked Ravel.

"Well, we will make it three parts."

"Kill him?"

"No, I would not wish to murder him, for he is a splendid seaman and a fine gentleman."

"What would you do with him?"

"Take him to some port at night and land him."

"And have him hunt us down, or recognize us in Havana some day?"

"That's true."

"Yes, I will return to Havana to spend my fortune, for I'm sure he's got a big one buried here on the island."

"And I, so let us make it three shares, and leave him on the island."

"To die, Juan?"

"Yes, why not?"

"So say I."

"His life is nothing to us, and, if, as I believe, the treasure is from a pirate craft, he is doubtless stealing it from his fellow buccaneers who put it here."

"If it is a pirate treasure it must be a big one."

"Yes."

"Well, we'll leave him on the island to die, for there is nothing to eat there."

"If he gets tired of starving he can drown himself in the sea."

"But let us find out about the treasure first."

"How can we?"

"We'll roll up some canvas to look like you and me asleep, Juan, and put our clothes on it, while Ravel can keep watch, should he come on deck, as he might."

"We'll take a lantern ashore, and he left the spade there, so we can soon find out just what it is."

"Must we take the boat, Josepha?"

"No indeed, Juan, we will swim ashore."

"A good idea," said Ravel, and a few moments after, half-drobing themselves and dressing up rolls of canvas to look like themselves asleep, Josepha and Juan slipped overboard and swam toward the beach.

One carried a lantern closely wrapped up in his hand and held it above the water, and thus they made for the shore.

They were good swimmers and had not far to go, so that they soon reached the beach, and picking up the spade which Rafael Rodriguez had left upon the beach, they walked toward the interior of the island.

They reached the spot where Josepha from the mast-head had seen Rafael Rodriguez digging in the afternoon, and unwrapping their lantern set to work.

Quickly did Josepha dig down to the box, for the dirt had been loosened, and they both got down upon their knees and, after some difficulty, raised it from its resting-place.

It was a box of the stoutest oak, heavily ribbed with iron bands, and they saw, to their regret, that it was securely locked.

But they shook it and there was a clanking, rattling sound within.

"It's treasure, Juan."

"Sure."

"We can't open it."

"No, it can only be done with tools."

"Well, we don't mind now, for it's ours."

"That's so."

"Let us put it back."

"No need of that, for we must return on board and get rid of the senior."

"All right; but hold your lantern closer."

"What is it?"

"Some lettering on the top of this box."

They brushed the dirt away and, with the lantern's aid, Josepha read:

"TREASURE-BOX"

OF

BELMONT THE BUCCANEER.

Accursed be he who steals my gold!

"Josepha!"

"Yes."

"We are the richest of men."

"We are, Juan."

"How about Ravel?"

"What do you mean?"

"It would be better if there were only two of us to divide it."

"Caramba! do you mean it?"

"I do."

"I am with you, Juan."

"You and I alone shall share this treasure."

"So be it; but now let us return to the sloop and first get rid of the senior."

"And Ravel must follow?"

"Yes."

They retraced their way to the beach, and were about to enter the sea to swim out when Josepha gave a loud cry.

"What is it?"

"The sloop has gone!"

It was true; the sloop was just disappearing from sight in the distance, going along under pressure of a six-knot breeze, and the two plotters stood gazing at each other in horror at the appalling sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DESERTED PLOTTERS.

WHEN the two vile plotters against the life of Rafael Rodriguez, and his treasure, saw the sloop in the distance, fading from view in the darkness, they stood like men who had lost the power of speech and movement.

They were dumb with amazement, dazed with dread for full a minute.

"What does it mean, Juan?"

"I don't know."

"The sloop has gone?"

"Sure."

"And we are here?"

"Yes."

"And our mate, Juan?"

"I do not understand it."

Then they were silent for awhile, and again began to discuss their situation when they felt that nothing could be done by silence.

They did not know what to think, and so they talked and talked to try and solve the mystery.

"Can Ravel have been a traitor to us?" asked Juan.

"What could he gain, mate?"

"That is true, unless—"

"Well?"

"He might tell the captain of our plot, and they decide to go to sea and leave us to die here, for we have nothing."

"No, we have nothing; but what would Ravel have gained?" asked Josepha.

"After we died they could come back, and Ravel would be well paid by the captain."

"Ah! this is a good idea, and I almost believe you are right."

Again they lapsed into silence, while the night moved on apace.

Suddenly Josepha sprung to his feet.

"See there!"

Their eyes fell upon a vessel.

It was not very far distant from the island and sailing slowly along.

"A schooner!"

"Yes, and an armed one, of course, for no other would be in these waters."

"True."

"That tells the secret."

"What?"

"Why the sloop has gone."

"How?"

"Do you not see that the cruiser was sighted by Ravel, who was on watch, and as he could not get to us he wakened the captain, and they put to sea to hide from her, for their course lay so as to keep the island between the sloop and the schooner."

"I guess that's it, Josepha, and the sloop will come back when the cruiser gets out of the way."

"Yes; but the captain will be angry that we came ashore, and may be on his guard."

"Let him."

"Is he armed, do you think?"

"I have never seen any weapons about him."

"Well, we will have to face him and fight it out, for we must have the treasure."

"We must."

"But suppose the schooner should send a boat ashore?"

"That would be bad, for we would be seen at once and the treasure found."

"I do hope she will pass on her way."

Eagerly they now watched the cruiser, and saw her, to their dismay, hold on a course that showed she was following the island coast.

Did it mean that she would send a boat ashore at daylight?

They crept back among the rocks in the interior, where the treasure-box was buried, and hid.

Then they breathlessly awaited the coming of dawn, and watched the shadowy outline of the vessel as it sailed around the island.

At last the dawn appeared in the eastward, brightening the skies into a rosy hue, and the two men in hiding were in the greatest anxiety about the schooner.

They dared not show their heads, even, fearing that a searching glass might find them out, and it was not until the day was several hours old that they gained the courage to peep out of their hiding-place.

Then they beheld the schooner a league away, and going from the island.

Her course and position showed that she had completely rounded the island.

They could hardly refrain from shouting in their joy, little dreaming that before long how

glad they would have been to have that same vessel come back to the island to bear them away.

They saw now that the schooner was armed, and the flag at her peak they thought was American.

"She's looking for pirates, Juan, and I guess our coming into their waters has been reported by some of the island traders."

"I guess so, Josepha; but she's gone, thank Heaven!"

"So say I, mate; but we are here, and all I wish now is to see the sloop put back."

"And I; but see, that looks like ugly weather," and Juan pointed to a mass of angry clouds rising in the westward.

"That may delay the sloop; but it's lucky they saw the schooner in time and got away, for she would have been taken, as the captain had no papers, and the captain of the cruiser might have wanted to see the bones he came here after."

"That's so; but what shall we do?"

"What can we do?"

That was a question that it was hard to answer.

They had not a morsel of food, their clothing consisted only of their breeches, they having left the rest on the sloop when they swam ashore.

There was a spring of brackish water on the island, but this was all.

They could see that their case was a bad one, should the storm keep the sloop away for several days.

It was desperate should the sloop not return in time to prevent their dying of hunger.

For a short while a fierce storm swept down upon the island, and the two men crouched among the rocks for protection.

All day long it lasted and they were in a sorry condition.

With the coming of night they huddled together among the wet rocks to get what rest they could.

The dawn found them wretched and hungry, and not a thing could they find to eat along the shore.

They walked about in their despair, scanning the sea for the glance of a sail.

But no sail came in sight, and the men saw another sun set upon their woe.

The storm had been a severe one, and perhaps, with only two men on board to do the work, the sloop had gone down.

The thought was appalling.

They still believed that they had not been intentionally deserted, but that the sloop had gone off to escape the schooner.

At last, in their anguish, they began to feel that they had been purposely left to die.

"They will come back for the treasure, Juan, when we have starved to death," cried Josepha, wildly.

"By Heaven they shall not have it, for we will cast it into the sea," was the savage response.

They had tried to open the box, but could not do so with the means at their command.

"We will cast it into the sea, mate," added Josepha.

But they waited, for the sloop might come.

Another day they waited, and then in their horror and despair they determined to cast the box into the sea.

But still they lingered, and when at last they attempted to carry it to the shore they were unable to raise it.

They shouted like madmen in their fury, and in fact were madmen.

But they were too weak to move the box.

Their strength was gone, and in a frenzy of rage they sprung upon each other like tigers.

CHAPTER IX.

ON BOARD THE SLOOP.

RAVEL had watched the departure of his two fellow-plotters, until they disappeared in the darkness shoreward, swimming with a steady, easy stroke.

Then he began to indulge in dreams, or rather build "castles in the air," for he was wide awake.

"The captain has come here for a treasure, that is certain," he mused.

It may be that he was a pirate captain, for he looks the leader all over, and maybe he was an officer who buried the treasure here from a buccaneer craft.

"Certain it is that there's a fortune lying yonder on the island."

"It may be an enormous sum, and maybe only a few thousands."

"If the former, then I would fare well with the others; but if not, then we'd all get little."

"I've no feeling for either Josepha or Juan, so why share with them?"

"I don't care for the captain, so why let him have the treasure?"

"I guess I'll just keep the treasure for myself."

"I can do it, so why not?"

"Let me see how it is to be done."

"I'll first kill the captain while he sleeps."

"That will get him out of the way."

"Then I'll get his weapons, for he's armed I know, and I'll kill Josepha and Juan as they come back on board."

"That leaves me master of the sloop and owner of the treasure.

"I can reef the mainsail, and that with the jib I can handle pretty well, and they will carry me as fast as I wish to go.

"I'll make for an American port, for they are not as suspicious there as in the towns of the West Indies.

"I will, if picked up at sea, state that we had come for the body of a prominent Spanish officer, who had died at sea and been buried on an island, and I will put the captain in the coffin and the treasure under his body, so they will believe me, and it will be easy enough to say how my comrades were washed over in a gale.

"I'll do it."

"Senor Ravel, your fortune is made, as soon as you have put an end to the lives of three men," and as the Cuban sailor spoke, the words came from behind him:

"I am to be your first victim, am I not, Senor Ravel?"

The man nearly swooned with fright, as the words fell upon him.

He had been musing aloud.

Every word he had uttered had reached the ears of Rafael Rodriguez, who had clambered out of the hatchway and sat within three feet of him.

A pistol was in one hand, a sword in the other, and he was master of the situation, for Ravel was wholly unarmed.

Then, too, the man knew that, physically, he was no master for the sloop's captain.

It was a bitter blow to him, to suddenly have his secret plot known, and feel that he was foiled.

He tried to spring to his feet, but his knees weakened.

He tried to speak, but could not.

"Never mind, Ravel, about an answer to my question, for I overheard your whole plot, as I did that of the two men who have gone ashore.

"I know that they intend to rob me, and share with you my treasure, for there is no denying longer that it is a treasure I have come after, and not dry bones.

"Well, Ravel, I have no desire to be hard upon you, and as I need your services, I will not kill you; but, on the contrary, pay you well for what you do. It is no easy matter to manage this sloop alone, so I need you.

"I wish you to understand that you are to remain on deck, and obey my orders.

"If you fail me, I shall simply kill you.

"Now, Ravel, those gentlemen have gone ashore to have a look at my treasure, and to give them ample time, I have a liking for a short cruise of several days.

"Then I shall return, and should they do just what they intended I should do, starve to death, why it will not be my fault.

"Get up the mainsail and jib, Ravel, and then anchor.

"I will see that you do your work well," and Rafael Rodriguez walked aft.

The man was in a perfect rage and amazement combined.

What could he do but obey?

He hesitated, when there came the stern words:

"Do you intend to obey me or not?"

Ravel started quickly to obey.

The jib was first run up, and then the mainsail, Rafael Rodriguez allowing him to tug at the halyards alone, while he stood by the tiller and watched him.

It was no easy task for him to set the mainsail and get up the anchor alone, but he did it, and the sloop stood out to sea.

Rodriguez fully appreciated his own position.

He knew that Ravel would kill him did he get the slightest chance.

He knew that the sloop would not be easily managed with but the aid of one man, whom he had to keep aloof for fear of treachery.

But he was determined to stand anything that man could endure to make no failure of his cruise.

If Ravel had to die, he would kill him, and try to man the sloop alone.

He had plotted to kill him without mercy, as the others had, when he was serving them well, and when he knew that they had designs upon his life why should he feel compunctions at taking their lives to save his own?

So he reasoned, and so he stood out to sea with the sloop.

The thought that the two plotters ashore, in revenge, might destroy his treasure never occurred to him.

Just as he gained an offing, he glanced astern, and beheld a sail.

It startled him, for capture then meant the ruin of his hopes.

So he ran on a cruise to keep out of sight of the stranger, as well as he could, and after half an hour's time was glad to see that he had not been sighted.

He had his weapons at hand, where he could use them upon Ravel, if need be, and he kept the sailor forward of amidships.

Thus the night passed away and the day dawned.

He sent the sailor below, under cover of his

pistol, to get food for them, and then made him return to his post again.

In the storm that came he was lying under the lee of a small island, which he had sought for a harborage when they saw that there was ugly weather coming.

Not wishing to go too far from the Treasure Island, he determined to remain where he was until he felt that the two men were sufficiently weakened by starvation for him to put them in irons, for he did not wish to take their lives unless driven to it.

Needing rest he bade Ravel get into the boat and row ashore, he taking his seat in the stern, pistol in hand.

The man meekly obeyed.

He had not spoken an unnecessary word since he had been so cleverly trapped.

"Now jump ashore, sir," Ravel did as he was told, but Rafael Rodriguez did not follow him, and seizing an oar shoved off from the beach.

CHAPTER X.

GUIDED BY FATE.

RAVEL was alarmed at the act of his captain. He feared that he was to be left to die upon the island.

It was a rocky, barren spot, where nothing could live, and he knew that he would die if left there.

"Oh, senor! for the love of God do not leave me here to perish," he shrieked, as the horror of his situation was forced upon him.

"I do not intend to let you perish, Ravel. I am not so merciless as you are; but, I need rest, for I have had no sleep for days and nights, as you know, having to watch you.

"If you are wise you will lie down in the dry sand and rest, for I go aboard the sloop to do so.

"I shall feel safe with you ashore, and may sleep for hours. But, when I awaken I will come back for you."

"Oh, thank you, senor!"

"You need not thank me, for I am acting only from a selfish motive; but I advise you to go to sleep, also."

"You will not leave me, senor--you promise me?"

"I do."

"Thank you, senor; but how I wish you would trust me, for, as you have been good in not killing me, I would do faithfully by you now, senor."

"I never trust a serpent, Ravel."

With this Rafael Rodriguez rowed leisurely back to the sloop, which had dropped anchor about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

He was very tired, and, in fact, utterly worn out. He had been worried about finding the island, during the days when he was looking for it, and he also had been sleepless.

Since leaving the Treasure Island with the two plotters there, he had not closed his eyes, and thus three nights and days had passed; so he hit upon the thought of landing Ravel upon the island while he rested.

Upon reaching the sloop he first set about cooking some food, and, after a hearty meal he laid down to rest.

It was just noon, and protected by the slack of the mainsail from the sun, he almost immediately sunk to sleep.

Hours passed, and still he slept, without motion, seemingly dead, so deep was his slumber.

The sun neared the horizon and its last rays peeped around the companionway and fell into his face.

Perhaps it was this that awoke him. Perhaps it was that sense of dread which men, being constantly in deadly danger, are sure to feel.

Certain it is that he opened his eyes.

He heard a slight splash in the water near the sloop. The sea was calm, only a light breeze was blowing, and so there was no wave. Perhaps it was a fish.

But he did not move.

Then a hand came over the top of the bulwark.

It was done cautiously, and yet it caused Rafael Rodriguez to quickly slip his hand into his bosom and grasp a weapon.

With eyes seemingly closed he remained motionless; but he saw between the nearly closed lids a man's head appear over the low bulwark of the sloop.

It was the face of Ravel that looked into that of Rafael Rodriguez, and between the teeth of the sailor was held a long, ugly-bladed knife.

A moment more, and having drawn himself upon the bulwark, with a spring like a panther's the intended assassin was upon his prey?

But the knife never reached the heart it sought, for there was a sharp report and Ravel fell forward upon his face.

Convulsively he drove the knife deep into the deck, in the very spot where Rodriguez had lain an instant before.

Then he tried to rise, tried to speak; but, he could do neither and dropped dead at the feet of the man whom he had tried to murder. He had swum out to the sloop hoping to find Rodriguez asleep and thus easily accomplish his assassination.

"I am sorry, for I shall have hard work managing the sloop alone. He was a treacherous

dog indeed, and yet I was half inclined to trust him to-day.

"Well, as he offered some good advice about having a body in the coffin as an excuse, should I be picked up, I shall take it, for I shall put him into it, cover him with sand and place the treasure beneath him, when I get it.

"Ah! what do I not have to go through to get that treasure! And will the end all come out as I hope?"

He mused awhile, and then took the body of Ravel and placed it in the coffin, which he had brought under pretense of going to the island after the remains of a kinsman.

Then he rowed ashore and got a boat-load of sand to put over it and, as it was dark when he finished his work, again sought rest.

But he was up bright and early, and getting up the anchor and sail, he headed back to the Treasure Island.

It was the next afternoon when he sighted it, and the sun was upon the western horizon when he ran in and dropped anchor in the little harborage from which he had sailed six nights before.

CHAPTER XI.

ALONE ON THE WATERS.

KNOWING how treacherous both Juan and Josepha had proven themselves, Rafael Rodriguez was determined to take no chances.

His desire to get the treasure and begin upon his search for his wife and child, made him cautious.

He had not expected to be gone so long, and he did not know but that the two men were dead.

But they might have found food, of fish or wild fowls, and yet be alive and swim out and attack him, if he should drop into a deep sleep, for the night would be dark and the twenty-four hours he had been at the tiller had made him very tired.

"I'll go ashore now, for I'll have time to look over the island before it is dark," he said.

So he hauled his boat up, from where it was towing astern, got his pistols together and saw that they were all right and then rowed ashore.

He saw no sign of any one as he landed, and yet there were numerous tracks in the sand made by the deserted men, in their wanderings over the island.

At once he started toward the spot where the treasure was, and, as he drew near he saw that it had been dragged out of its hiding-place.

Then he discovered the form of one of the men, and in another moment saw the other.

They were locked in each other's embrace.

"Poor fellows! I fear they have died a fearful death," he said, with real pity in his heart for them.

But his belief was that they had died in despair, their arms clasped about each other in sympathy.

A closer look showed him that his surmise was wrong, for the two men were bruised, and gashed, while their hands still grasped each other in death.

The blood was hardly yet dry upon their wounds, showing that they had not been long dead.

It was an appalling sight to the treasure-seeker for the right hand of Josepha grasped the throat of his companion, whose teeth were buried in his shoulder.

The starving, weakened, dying men had ended their lives in a fierce death-struggle.

Wanderer that he had been over sea and land, inured to scenes most fearful, Rafael Rodriguez turned away in horror and walked rapidly back to the shore.

Pulling out to his sloop he tried to eat some supper; but his appetite was gone.

Then he saw that all was shipshape on board for the night and sought sleep.

But slumber would not come to his eyes, and he tossed about restlessly for hours, when, at last worn out he sunk to sleep.

With the rising of the sun he became reconciled to the situation and after breakfast rowed to the island, carrying a shovel and spade with him.

The men lay as he had left them, and within their reach was the treasure-box.

Digging a grave near, in the sand, Rodriguez buried the two and then set to work to get his treasure on board the sloop.

It was no easy work to get it down to the beach, and he recalled how much stronger he was than upon the occasion when he had been wrecked there.

The life of hardship which he had led had made him like a man of iron.

At last he got the box on board the sloop, and, still recalling the sight he had witnessed, he determined to trust to chance about being picked up by some vessel, and not make use of the body of Ravel.

So the body was lifted from the coffin, taken ashore and buried by the side of the others; then Rodriguez returned on board the sloop, put the strong box into the coffin, screwed down the lid, and sought the sleep he so much needed, for night was upon him.

With the dawn of day he got up sail, reefing the mainsail in case a blow should catch him,

and then hauling up the anchor, headed out of the little harbor upon his return to Cuba.

He had taken his bearings, and knew where he was, and that it would be several days' sail, even with the winds favorable, as they then were, before he could reach Buena Vista Plantation, to which he had determined to go.

But, fortune seemed to favor him; no lowering clouds came up to threaten his little vessel with destruction.

"Fate seems to smile upon me," he said the afternoon of the second day out from the island, as his sloop went bowling along, logging five knots an hour, and with a breeze that allowed him to shape his course well for home.

The afternoon of the next day Cespedes was seated upon the rickety bench of the rustic sea arbor in front of the mansion on Buena Vista Plantation, when he saw a sail approaching the coast, as though to make the harbor under the hill.

"It's a small sloop, and she certainly is coming to the Buena Vista Haven," he said.

"It can't be the Senor Rodriguez, for he would have gone to Havana, as was his intention."

"He has now been gone nearly a month, and it may be that he was unable to find the island, or some harm might have befallen him."

"God grant not that, for he has had his share of misery, and it's to my thinking, if he goes on this search after his wife and child he will know more."

"But I will say nothing, but let him go— Ah! that craft is certainly coming into our harbor."

"Yes, she points for the channel— Ha! I see the senor at the helm."

"He has returned!"

And Cespedes arose and started at a rapid pace down the path leading to the shore of the little haven.

Cespedes was a good man, with a heart in him as large as an ox.

He had been well born, but his parents were poor and he turned to a life of agriculture, and became overseer of the Buena Plantation when Victorine Rudolph, who became the wife of Rafael Rodriguez, was only a child.

Ever faithful to his trust, he had, when the plantation was sold, purchased it with his accumulated earnings, expecting that some day the mistress might wish to buy it back again, for he could not understand her selling the birthplace of several generations.

On the verge of fifty years, he was still a bachelor, having "loved and lost" in his youthful years, and had ever been true to that early affection, as he was to everything and everybody else.

When he sighted the sloop and beheld Rafael Rodriguez at the tiller steering her into the little plantation haven, he hastened to the beach.

Just as he reached there, the sloop ran in alongside of the half-ruined pier and was made fast by Rodriguez, who, seizing a rope, sprung out and gave it a turn around a post.

"Back again, thank Heaven, senor!" cried Cespedes.

"Yes, and alone, as you see; but I have the treasure safe, my good friend," was the remark of Rodriguez, as he grasped the hand of the overseer.

CHAPTER XII. ON THE TRACK.

HAD there been curious eyes about the old mansion of Buena Vista Plantation, the night of the arrival of the little sloop in the haven, they would have witnessed a strange sight.

The servants had not been told of the coming of their former master, and Cespedes had gone up to the villa and had his supper all alone.

Then he had sent the slaves to their cabins, and feigning sickness, had gone to his room apparently to retire.

But he did not retire, for instead he took a bunch of keys and walked through the halls which had been deserted for years, and went to a front wing of the large and rambling building.

One of the doors opening into the hall he opened, and found himself in the former library.

The furniture was old and worn, and dust rested upon everything.

This room had not been entered for years.

With his keys in hand he walked to the fireplace, and with the lamp he carried found a carved panel at one side, and into the half-open mouth of the head of a Cupid he inserted a key.

No one would have suspected that there was a keyhole there; but there was, and turning the key in the lock Cespedes stood back as the massive panel swung open.

A narrow stairway was disclosed, and as though satisfied, the overseer closed the panel and left the room.

Turning into the main hall he opened the front door, the bolts and lock creaking like the cry of a human voice in pain.

Closing the door behind him he did not lock it, and with his lantern bidden under his coat walked rapidly down to the beach.

The sloop lay at the wharf, firmly secured, and with furled sails.

All was dark on board of her, but a low voice asked:

"Is that you, Cespedes?"

"Yes, senor."

"Well?"

"The slaves have gone to their quarters, senor, and I found the keys you spoke of and the one you told me of opened the secret panel in the chimney."

"No one would ever have suspected a door being there."

"My wife's father had it so built, and, as I told you, the steps lead down to a vault beneath, and in the base of the chimney, so if the house burned down it would not be discovered."

"A better hiding-place could not be found, senor."

"No; but shall we start now?"

"I am ready, senor."

The forward hatch was then opened, and out of the hold was lifted the coffin in which Rodriguez had placed the treasure-box.

Taking it up the two men left the sloop and began the hard climb up the hill.

The box was a heavy one, and it was no easy work, taxing the strength of both Rodriguez and the overseer to the utmost.

But at last the hilltop was reached, and, after a long rest, they carried their ghastly-appearing load across the weed and thicket-grown lawn up to the front door of the mansion.

This they entered, and a dark lantern was uncovered and set upon the coffin to light their way along the corridors.

Into the library they went, the secret slide was opened, and after considerable difficulty the coffin was deposited upon the floor of what was a vault in the base of the massive chimney.

It was but eight feet long, by five wide, but it was large enough, and the men gave a sigh of relief when their valuable load was placed upon the floor.

The key of the box Rafael Rodriguez had long since lost, and so the overseer went off after tools with which to open it, for both felt a longing desire to at once see the contents of the box.

After a long while the stout lock yielded, and the lid was raised.

Cespedes almost shouted with joy, while Rafael Rodriguez spread his hands above the treasure as though invoking a blessing upon the vast riches before him.

"It is a king's ransom, senor, for see! there is gold, silver, jewels, watches, chains, trinkets of all kinds that are indeed of priceless value."

"Oh, senor! God knows I congratulate you," and Cespedes wrung the hand of Rodriguez over and over again.

Rafael Rodriguez was calm, strangely so.

After all he had suffered he had a fortune in his grasp.

That fortune would enable him to find his wife and child, to bring them back to their old home.

"Come, Cespedes, let us go, for I would talk with you a while, and then I must set the little sloop adrift."

"Set it adrift, senor?" asked Cespedes, in surprise.

"Yes, Cespedes, for I noticed that the wind was off-shore, and I can lash her tiller and set her jib so that she will run out of sight before morning and will be picked up or go down in a storm."

"But why, senor?"

"In buying the craft, Cespedes, I was very particular to let no one know aught about me."

"Its crew are dead, and it is best that I should not return alone in it, as I may have to explain."

"I will set the sloop adrift, taking with me your surf-skiff to return in, and then I will come up to the mansion and pretend to arouse you, and you can awaken the servants to prepare a room for me."

"I will say that I landed from a sloop that put me off here, and you and I alone will know the secret, Cespedes."

"Yes, senor, it is better so," was the reply of the overseer, and the two walked together down to the wharf.

Upon the beach lay a surf-skiff, one used by Cespedes for fishing, and this was taken in tow, and the sloop stood out of the harborage, the overseer accompanying Rodriguez.

For over a league they went out to sea, and then a drag was thrown over the stern, the jib was left set, the mainsail lowered and the tiller lashed, when the little craft, which had served Rafael Rodriguez well, went on its way before the wind, to what fate no one could foretell.

Having seen the sloop sailing off crewless upon the waters, the two men rowed back in the skiff to the shore, and upon landing, Cespedes went to arouse the servants with the information that their old master had returned.

There was rejoicing among the few slaves, and the more so, when the next day they were bought back again by Rafael Rodriguez, the plantation was also purchased, and the master went to Havana to send out workmen to put the mansion in perfect order and refurnish it in superb style.

Rafael Rodriguez had decided to use his gold liberally to make his home fitting the return of his wife and child, and with a vast fortune at his command, he was most generous in his expenditures, and was determined to have all in readiness ere his departure, for he had waited so long that he concluded a few more months' delay ere he started to find those he so dearly loved would make but little difference, especially as he was making almost a palace of his home for their reception.

When at last he bade Cespedes farewell, and with all the data he could obtain to guide him, he started upon their track. Buena Vista Plantation was the envy of all the neighboring planters, who had welcomed back Rafael Rodriguez as from the grave, and men wondered where he had found a fortune so princely.

But the wanderer wisely held his peace, and the secret remained locked in the heart of Cespedes and himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRIVATEERSMAN.

AT the time when Rafael Rodriguez had been left in irons in the hold of the buccaneer schooner, which, deserted by her crew who believed her sinking, had been wrecked upon an island of the Bahamas, the vessel that had captured Belmont the Buccaneer was a craft sailing as an American privateer, or pirate-hunter.

The commander of this vessel was a bold man and a fine seaman, and he had fought his vessel well, and believing that the schooner was sinking and would go down in the storm that was coming down upon them, he had been content with the capture of the buccaneer chief and rescue of two of his captives, the Senor Victorine Rodriguez and her young daughter Norma.

The American captain too had been so seriously wounded in the fight that the surgeon found it necessary to amputate one of his legs.

This was done, and the Senora Rodriguez urging that he visit Buena Vista Plantation and remain until his wound healed, he did so.

Then he sailed for the States, and the result was that one afternoon he put into the port from whence he hailed, with his prisoner, Belmont the Buccaneer, hanging aloft in punishment for his piracies upon the high seas.

Another visit was then made by the cruiser's captain, Rufus Sprague, to the Buena Vista Plantation, and the result was the Senora Victorine, believing her husband dead, became the wife of the man who had rescued her and her child from the cruel power of Belmont the Buccaneer, and went with him to dwell at his home of Beacon Hill, a lordly old mansion situated on a ridge overlooking the seaport of G— on the Massachusetts Coast.

Captain Sprague was a man of wealth, and also about him there hung a certain air of mystery.

He had been a sailor all his life, was descended from a rich family who had left Beacon Hill to him as an heirloom, and yet had kept at sea after having served gallantly as a privateersman in the war between England and the States.

He had fitted up his home ere he brought his wife there, and then had given up the sea, he said forever, as having one leg was a drawback aboard ship.

Then too he was in full view of the sea, had a lovely home and was content to live in happiness with his wife and child, for he had insisted upon it that the little Norma should be known as his child, and stated to his friends that he had married, some years before, a Cuban heiress, and kept the secret that Victorine was the widow, as he believed, of Rafael Rodriguez.

For awhile all went well in Beacon Hill, and Mrs. Sprague seemed at least contented with her lot, if not happy.

The one love of her life was Rafael Rodriguez, and so her heart was in the sea where she believed he lay.

She felt grateful to Rufus Sprague for rescuing her and her child, and so had become his wife.

Beacon Hill was a home in which to enjoy life and she had every luxury about her.

The sea stretched away in boundless space before her, the rugged coast was in view for miles each way from the piazza, the little seaport of G— lay at the foot of the hill on which the mansion stood, and the scene was one of enchanting beauty.

To the left, half a mile or so distant, on the same ridge, stood Overlook Manor, the home of a seafaring family, and whose heirs were both sailors, and at sea, so that it was deserted save by a couple of old servants who had it in charge.

At the foot of the hill, to the left, was the little Episcopal church of the town, and surrounding it was a burying-ground.

In that burying-ground rested the remains of Belmont the Buccaneer, and a tomb, mysteriously erected to his memory one night, by, none in G— knew whom, could be seen from the piazza.

But never did Mrs. Sprague allow her eyes to rest upon the mysterious monument to a pirate, as it brought up sad and bitter memories of the past.

Such was the home to which Victorine, the

wife of Rafael Rodriguez, and his child had been taken.

The villagers deemed that only joy rested within the walls of Beacon Hill; but alas! there was a skeleton in the closet of the mansion.

That skeleton lay in the heart of Victorine, the beautiful mother of little Norma, and who, though allowing Commodore Sprague, as he was called by the villagers, to say that the sweet little child was his, had fought against it.

"She is all I have, senior, to connect me with the past, with her noble father, so why not let it be known that I was a widow when I became your wife, and I will be so much happier?"

So she had urged, but Rufus Sprague was as firm as a rock, and he refused to allow her to let the truth be known regarding little Norma.

"The child is the same as though she were my own, I love her as fondly as her father would, and so let it rest, Victorine," was his reply.

There was another thing that worried the poor woman, and that was the monument of Belmont, the Buccaneer.

One night of storm it had been taken there and put up, presumably from the shore, where a vessel had landed it; but no one had the slightest clew to the person who had dared to raise a monument in honor of a pirate.

And this mystery caused the good people of G—to shun the graveyard when the sun began to sink beneath the horizon.

No one would go very near it, and a curse, it was said, would fall upon the one who attempted to remove it.

Yet, for all this, Mrs. Sprague had urged the commodore to remove it, and to have the remains of the dead buccaneer taken from the graveyard and buried elsewhere, where her eyes would never rest upon the grave of the man to whom she owed so much sorrow.

It might have been stubbornness, it may have been superstition in the commodore, but certain it was that he never removed the monument from the lonely corner in the cemetery where it rested over the remains of Belmont, the Buccaneer, the man whom he had hanged.

Thus stood matters at Beacon Hill about the time that Rafael Rodriguez was captured by a corsair and sold into slavery in Morocco.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MAN WITH A MEMORY.

ONE afternoon the commodore was in the village where he went at times to enjoy a chat with a few old cronies, and Victorine had gone for a walk alone in the woods to the right of the mansion.

She was seated upon a stone by the side of the path, gazing out upon the sea, which held her love, when she was startled by the query:

"Please, lady, and where is Beacon Hill?"

She arose and saw a man in the highway, leaning over the fence that inclosed the woods. He was in the garb of a sailor, and had a dark, bearded face, but not a forbidding one.

"Beacon Hill is that mansion you see yonder, sir."

"Whom would you see there?"

"The commodore, as they call him in these parts, lady."

"Commodore Sprague is in the village and will not be home for an hour or two yet."

"Are you his lady?"

"I am Mrs. Sprague, yes."

"Well, lady, I sailed with Captain Sprague once, and as luck is down on me now, I thought I would come by and ask him to give me a few thousands."

"A few thousands?" asked Victorine in surprise.

"Yes, lady, thousands is what I said."

"What claim have you on my husband to ask him for such a sum?"

"A claim I think he will recognize."

"A little aid he will doubtless give you, sir; but you seem to wish a small fortune," and Victorine smiled.

"I want thousands, as I said, and I'll get it," and Victorine saw the man's face assume a threatening look.

"You will have to see him, sir; but what your claim is to demand thousands, I cannot comprehend."

"Lady, let me explain, so I'll have your aid in securing what I need, for I've got to have it, or I'll tell tales."

Victorine walked closer to the fence and said quietly:

"You threaten, sir?"

"I do."

"Upon what foundation?"

"You wish to know?"

"Certainly, for what interests my husband interests me."

"I would like to know what you have to say, sir."

"By Neptune, lady, but I'll tell you, for with you to help me I'll not fail in my demand."

"I am not so sure of that, sir."

"I am; for I'm a man with a memory, and I can prove what I remember," was the significant response of the man who fixed his eyes full upon the beautiful face within a few feet of him.

Victorine was impressed by the man's manner, and a nervous thrill poured over her.

The tone of the speaker indicated conscious

power, and there was that about him which led her to believe him to be one who would act without remorse in all he did.

"What is it you remember?" she asked.

"I am, as I said, in hard luck; but it's my own fault, for I am improvident, and did not save as I might have done."

"Then, too, it is not best always to lay up gold that was gotten as I got mine."

"So I am dead broke, lady, and have come to get funds to keep me going."

"And you come to my husband?"

"I do."

"You will demand hush money?"

"Exactly."

"That some secret you pretend to hold shall remain a secret?"

"It is as you say."

"What is your secret?"

"Will you pay to have it kept?"

"Not a dollar, for you must go to the one whose secret you hold."

"I think it best to post you lady."

"As you please."

"As you will know what it is, he will be urged by you the more not to let disgrace fall upon himself and those who bear his name."

"Is it then so fearful, senior?" and again those nervous thrills went through the heart of Victorine.

"I will tell you and let you judge."

"I will listen," and Mrs. Sprague leant upon the fence between the two and nerved herself to hear all.

"Your husband held a roving commission in the late war as a privateersman, did he not?"

"He did."

"When the war ended he still held on, with permit to do special service as a hunter down of pirates on the Atlantic shores and in the gulf and West Indian Islands."

"Is this not so?"

"I believe that it is, sir."

"Well, lady, although your husband had a fine home and riches, he was anxious to get more gold, and so was not content with carrying out his commission to the letter of the law, but feeling enmity still against his old foes, the British, he could not resist bringing to an English craft, if she was richly freighted, and robbing her."

"Sir?"

"It is true, lady, and that he might not be suspected, his vessel was always disguised at such times, and floated a black flag at the peak to pretend to be a pirate."

Victorine bowed her head and her bosom heaved with emotion.

For a moment she did not speak, and then with an effort she commanded herself and her words came sharp and stern:

"You say what is false, sir!"

"You have concocted a story to try and force gold from me."

"But you shall fail in your attempt."

"Begone, sir, or I will call to my aid what you will little care to meet."

The man almost shrunk back under flashing eyes and words; but he essayed to speak again, when she said, sternly:

"Be off!"

As he did not obey, she raised to her lips a silver whistle which hung to her waist, and gave a long blast.

Instantly there was heard answering yelps, fierce and sharp, and the man knew that discretion was the best part to play just then, so called out:

"I have not done with you, my lady, nor your husband either, as you shall know."

Then he fled.

And none too soon, as a moment after there danced up to the side of their mistress two huge dogs as fierce-looking as tigers.

"Come, Fangs, you and Grip go with me for a walk," said Victorine, and with the two dogs following her, she walked away through the woods.

But her heart was troubled, her brain burned with what she had heard, and her face showed that she felt that there was perhaps some truth in the story which the man had told her about her husband.

"If true, I will soon know, and then I shall gain my ends," she mused as she turned her steps homeward.

CHAPTER XV.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE PAST.

THOUGH minus a leg, Commodore Sprague was a very active man, and with a wooden substitute for the missing limb, managed to get about with considerable activity.

He would prefer walking down into the town, rather than ride, and on the day when Victorine was confronted by the roadside with the stranger, the commodore had walked to the tavern to enjoy a game of cards and a talk with a few old cronies who had been sea-captains like himself.

The stranger, in taking to his heels after meeting with Victorine, had gone along the highway leading toward the town.

He had turned into a footpath, after passing Beacon Hill Mansion, and seated himself for rest on a rock in a little pine thicket.

He had not been there long before he heard a heavy step, and looking down the path beheld a form approaching.

It was the commodore, coming slowly up the path, which led by the river thicket.

As he drew near, the man stepped out and said, at the same time saluting:

"A good afternoon to you, Captain Sprague."

The commodore halted, glanced at the man and replied:

"How are you, my man, and who are you that knows me?"

"I am one who once sailed with you, sir."

The commodore started slightly, and said:

"I do not recall your face, my man."

"It was a long time ago, sir."

"When?"

"When you commanded the schooner Sea Shark."

Again the commodore started; but he said:

"I have had many a man sail under my command, so I forget faces; but as you are a sailor and seem to remember me, let me ask if I can serve you?"

"You can, sir."

"I will give you aid, if you need it, so about what will do you, my man?"

The commodore spoke in an off-hand sort of manner, but he kept his eyes fixed upon the man the while, and did not appear wholly at his ease.

"I will want a matter of five thousand dollars, sir."

"Five thousand Satans! What do you mean?" roared the commodore.

"Just what I say."

"Begone, for you are a vagabond."

"I am a vagabond, yes, but I'll not go until you do as I demand."

"You demand?"

"So I said."

"You are a fool."

"I may have been, but just now I am wise in coming after money to one who will pay it to me."

"Not a cent will you get from me."

"Don't say rash things, captain, for I will get what I ask for."

"Ha! you intend to rob me?"

"No, I ask you for five thousand dollars, and the case is just this."

"I was a wild lad, ran off to sea, leaving my old parents to mourn for me."

"I went from bad to worse, until I got to be a pirate—"

"Aha! I will commit you upon your own confession."

"Don't get ahead of the hounds, captain, or you'll lose the scent."

"I tell you I became a pirate, and the gold I got I threw away."

"At last remorse began to gnaw at my heart for the manner in which I had treated the old folks."

"I went to see them, keeping myself unknown to them, and I found that they were not doing well."

"They are getting old, and my father had to mortgage his farm to live on, so they are eating up their home."

"I have a conscience, and it is my wish to go home, carry with me enough to raise the mortgage, restock the farm and have something over to make my parents comfortable in their old age, and to live there with them."

"Now I come to you for the five thousand dollars I need."

"All this is a romantic tale of nonsense, and I'll not give you a dollar, so be off."

"No, for you will give me the gold."

"I will not."

"You are a very rich man, and it is nothing to you, what I ask."

"Give it to me."

"I say no!"

"Very well, I shall go down into the village and get out papers to arrest you for having committed acts of piracy when sailing in the privateer schooner Sea Shark."

The commodore's face became livid.

"What do you mean?" he fairly gasped.

"Just what I say, for you did commit acts of piracy, as I can prove, and, though you hanged Belmont the Buccaneer, married a lovely woman, gave up the sea, and are now dwelling in a splendid home, with large wealth at your command, I bring you face to face with your past."

"I tell you, Captain Sprague, you either give me the sum I demand, or I will prove that you were a pirate."

The cold sweat broke out upon the face of the commodore.

He was deeply moved, and sat down upon a large rock near, taking his hat off as though he felt oppressed.

At last, after having meditated a moment, he said:

"My man, after the war ended, there were some little acts committed by both American and British vessels of war that were not exactly right, irregular in fact."

"But this was unintentional, and my vessel was not an exception to the rule, and I regret that it was so."

"But as I do not wish, in my declining years,

and with my family about me, to get mixed up in an investigation, though it would result to my credit, I wish to say that I will give you half the sum you ask, if you will pledge yourself not to again cross my path or to impart to another the secret you hold."

"It must be five thousand, Captain Sprague."

"That is a large sum."

"It is what I need."

"Make it three thousand, then?"

"Not a dollar less."

"Then I will have to yield, and I will pay you the money to-night."

"Shall I call at the mansion?"

"No, for I wish not to be seen with you."

"Do you see that burying-ground yonder?"

"I do."

"You note a monument off to itself in one corner, that nearest the sea?"

"Yes."

"I will meet you there at nine to-morrow night."

"Why in that desolate spot, and why delay until to-morrow?"

"I am going to take tea with the parson to-morrow night, and when I leave his house can go to meet you, while I could not get you the money before to-morrow."

"A day makes little difference when you have your game caged, so I'll be there, captain, though I like not such lonely trysting-places even where the object is gold and not love."

"Adios, Senor Captain," and the man walked away, while the commodore muttered:

"I knew him the moment I saw him."

"He was coxswain of my gig, and a likely fellow."

"Well, I must go there to meet him."

"But there are others who knew me on the Sea Shark and they may turn up, for this fellow will send them when he squanders his money, and I'll be robbed."

"I must think this over," and so saying, the commodore walked on homeward.

CHAPTER XVI.

VICTORINE'S SUSPICIONS.

WHEN Commodore Sprague returned home the sun had just gone down, and his wife stood upon the front piazza gazing upon the beauty of the sunset scene, with masses of gold and crimson clouds high above the western horizon.

Norma, a beautiful child, was playing about in the yard, chasing a kitten, when she beheld her father coming up the gravel yard and, with a cry of delight ran to meet him.

He bent over and kissed her, and the two walked on to the piazza.

Mrs. Sprague was pale, but calm, and, with a guilty conscience after his meeting with the sailor, the commodore felt that she looked at him in a strange way.

Certainly her manner was restrained, and telling Norma to go into the house, she said:

"Senor, I wish to have a talk with you."

"Well, my dear?" and the man's heart gave a bound of anxiety.

"Will you tell me if you ever sailed under a black flag?"

The question came so suddenly that the commodore was fairly stunned by it.

"What do you mean, senora?" he asked, for he often gave her the Spanish prefix of senora, as she often called him senor.

"I asked you if you have ever sailed under the black flag of a pirate, senor?"

He was sure that she too had seen the sailor.

He had doubtless told her all.

So he decided to meet the situation boldly, and said:

"My dear Victorine, your question is a strange one, after what has just happened to me, and I shall answer it in all truth."

"That is what I wish, senor."

"As I came up the hill, and approached the pine thicket where I always rest for a few minutes, I was surprised to meet there a man."

"He was dressed as a sailor, and I saw that his face was familiar."

"He addressed me by name, told me that he had sailed with me in the Sea Shark privateer and calmly demanded five thousand dollars of me, which he said I must pay to him."

"On what grounds, senor?"

"He claimed that I had sailed under a black flag, and committed piracies upon the high seas."

"He claimed this?"

"Yes, and I remembered that he had been coxswain of my gig on the Sea Shark."

"At that time, just after the ending of the war, I had a mutiny on board my vessel, the men demanding that I should give them each a sum of gold which I did not have."

"To appease them, I started in chase of what I believed to be a pirate craft, determined to give them the treasure found on board."

"The vessel was taken after a hot fight, but proved to be an armed merchant-brig, with a rich cargo on board."

"Her crew were nearly all slain, and, as she was sinking, I transferred her cargo to my vessel."

"She was British, and in chasing her I showed the black flag, hoping to make her show her colors."

"She did so, and it was the English flag, as I have said; but in the excitement of the chase I forgot to order the black flag lowered from my peak and the American colors set, and thus the fight was under the sable ensign."

"This cargo I was forced to give to my crew, to appease them, and so it came out that I was accused of piracy, and upon this the sailor determined to blackmail me into paying him hush-money."

"And what did you do?" asked Victorine.

"Told him to be off or I would put him in jail."

"It was the right course, as you intentionally had done no wrong, senor."

"But I, too, saw the man, and he made the same charge against you to me; but when I whistled for Grip and Fangs he fled."

"You did right, my brave wife; and now let us drop the matter," and the commodore took his wife's arm and led her into the house to supper, for the bell had just rung to call them to that meal.

But in spite of her husband's seemingly frank story of the affair, Victorine felt ill at ease; but she kept this feeling to herself.

That night she was in deep thought, and when her husband repaired to his library for a while she took occasion to suddenly enter it.

She found him counting out some money, taken from the secret vault in the floor of the library.

He started at her entrance, and then said:

"I am counting over my money, Victorine, to see just what I have on hand."

"I thought that you knew, for it was only two days ago that we went over it together."

"Well, I will do so again, for I may have made a mistake."

"Shall I help you?"

"No, thank you," and he went on handling the gold and notes in an uneasy kind of way until she left the room.

But she had seen a bag of gold and pile of notes already set aside as she entered, and after her departure from the library she no longer heard the clinking of metal, as before her entrance.

"He has been counting money; but I believe he intends to pay it to that man," she muttered.

Soon after her husband left the library, and all day long he seemed ill at ease.

Toward sunset he said:

"Victorine, I am going down to the parson's to spend the evening."

"Do you wish me to accompany you, senor?"

"No, for I wish to see Parson Mordecai upon a little matter for a friend. I shall not be out late."

"Shall I send the carriage after you?"

"Oh, no, for it will be a fine night and I will walk home."

A few moments after he left the mansion, and when darkness came on Victorine left it also, and her way led her down toward the rectory, which was the last house in town in the direction of the cemetery.

CHAPTER XVII.

SILENCED.

TRUE to his word Commodore Sprague went to the rectory.

He liked the young parson, and so often dropped in to see him, his aged parents and little sister enjoying the society of all.

Of course he was invited to tea, for it was just about dark, and he accepted.

He remained for some time after tea and then arose to go.

The parson offered to see him a part of the way home, but he said that he would go to the village and then find a vehicle to drive up to the mansion if he was tired.

He shook hands with Parson Mordecai at the gate, and started toward the village.

But after going a short distance he crossed the road and went back along the highway toward the burying-ground.

Not a soul did he expect to meet in that direction, for he well knew how every one shunned the sacred and secluded spot by night.

Reaching the gateway he turned it, passed by the little ivy-grown church, and walked on toward the sea-shore.

Reaching the wall that ran along the cliff overhanging the beach, he turned to the right and made his way toward the corner where stood the monument of Belmont, the Buccaneer.

As he approached it his heart almost stood still.

He was a sailor and therefore held the superstitions of seamen, and he regretted having made the appointment with the man at the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer.

He had banded the pirate chief, and had him buried there, and over him the monument had been most mysteriously erected, so it was far from pleasant to him to go there.

But he had made the appointment in the glare of day, so must not hang back when the darkness of night was upon the earth.

So on he walked, with a quick, firm step, considering his wooden leg, and stood a moment more, within a few feet of the monument.

Out from its shadow stepped a form, and a voice said:

"You are late, are you not, senor?"

"No, it is not yet nine."

"Ah! it was the waiting in this desolate place that made time drag so."

"Then too I had no watch."

"I am come as I promised."

"A fitting place for us to meet, captain, two pirates at the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer."

"Silence! I came not here to be insulted."

"No; but tell me, do you believe in ghosts?"

"No."

"Are you not superstitious?"

"I am not," and Commodore Sprague shuddered as he uttered the words.

"I am not one to have fear, but yet I have seen a ghost this night."

"Nonsense!"

"It is true."

"What did you see?"

"I saw a form clad in white come from the shadow of the church and walk around the graves."

"You imagined it."

"I did not, and I tell you it was hard to keep from running off."

"But I remained under the pressure of getting your gold."

"When did you last see this ghost, as you call it?"

"Some few minutes before your arrival."

"Where?"

"It went yonder toward that tree on the cliff and then disappeared."

"You saw what you feared, for it was but a fancy of your fright."

"Well, fancy or not, I do not care to see it again, and more, I shall get away from here as soon as possible."

"Well?"

"Have you my gold?"

"I have a thousand in gold, as much more in bank-notes."

"How am I to see what you have brought?"

"You must take my word for it, as I have counted it out for you."

"I will have to; but if I find you have defrauded me, you will hear from me."

"Here, take your money and go; but understand, if you darken my life again with your presence, it will be at your peril."

"I will not come again, unless I have to, and if I am compelled to do so you will pay me hush money as you now do."

A muttered oath came from the lips of the commodore, and then he said:

"Here is your gold—take it."

The man held out his hand and grasped the bag of gold.

"Now the bank-notes?"

"They are here."

The commodore held them so that they were grasped in the other hand of the man.

As he did so the commodore said, in a startled whisper:

"Look there!"

The man started and turned quickly.

As he did so there came a sudden thud, and deep into the back of the sailor sunk a knife.

There was a cry of pain, a spring into the air, and the man fell his length upon the ground.

Just then a black storm cloud swept across the face of the moon, as though to shut out from its sight the tragedy.

When, a few moments after, the moon shone forth again, a man was going at a rapid step toward the gateway of the cemetery.

"The tide has just begun to turn, and it will bear his body out to sea."

"I have the gold again, and he is silenced forever."

"Great God! what is that?"

As he spoke, Commodore Sprague came to a standstill, and a look of horror swept over his face.

And no wonder, for he beheld a form, clad in snowy white gliding swiftly along another walk that led toward the little church.

It seemed fairly to float in the air, to fly, and in an instant had disappeared in the shadow of the church.

With teeth that chattered together Commodore Sprague resumed his steps and made his way at a pace that was painful to him, out of the burying-ground and thence homeward.

Entering the library he sat there a long while before he was calm enough to let his wife know of his return.

The tragedy in the graveyard, and the ghostly object he had seen had unnerved him, man of iron that he was.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S COURAGE.

VICTORINE felt, after her strange interview with the sailor, and talk with her husband, there was cause for suspicion that all was not as the commodore asserted.

She thought that there must be something behind the words of the strange seaman, or he would not have come to Beacon Hill to demand gold of his former commander.

Hearing the clink of gold she had entered the

library, to find her husband counting out a certain sum of money.

She had noted his start of annoyance at being seen, and she determined to be on the watch for him.

It seemed unusual for her husband to go to the home of Rector Mordecai for supper, without taking her, and so she determined to see if he went there, and to do this she must watch him.

Seeing him enter the house, she started upon her return home when she beheld a man pass along the road going in the direction of the cemetery.

She shrunk back in the thicket and he did not see her, and watching him, from her stand on the hillside, she saw him enter the burying-ground, loiter awhile among the graves, and then make his way over to the tomb of Belmont the Buccaneer.

The man she recognized as the sailor who had demanded her aid in getting gold from the commodore.

"It is as I feared, for the cemetery is the place where they are to meet."

"The commodore will remain at the parsonage until after night, and then join the man there."

"And I will be there, too!"

With this remark she hastened back to the mansion.

There she arrayed herself all in white, and wrapping about her form a dark skirt, and throwing a shawl over her shoulders, she bravely went forth to determine if her suspicions were correct.

Hers was a bold nature, and though superstitious and dreading the cemetery in a great degree, as others did, she had nerved herself not to falter.

It was dark when she reached the cemetery and entered it.

Creeping along among the hedges, and gazing with awe upon the grave-stones, she at last gained a position as near the monument of the buccaneer chief as she dared go.

There she crouched among some bushes and waited, for relieved against the sky she had seen the form of a man pacing to and fro.

Now and then he would whistle in a low tone, as though to keep his courage up in a place so weird and desolate, and then he suddenly came toward the spot where she was.

To discover her would be to defeat her ends, and so she determined to frighten him, as she believed she could do.

Off went the dark shawl and wrap, and in pure white she glided along a path of the burying-ground, in and out among the head-stones.

The man saw the weird form and shrunk from his intention, which had evidently been to walk toward the entrance to the cemetery.

So he quickly retraced his way to the monument of the buccaneer, which, as has been said, stood apart by itself.

He seemed to feel that he was safer alone with the dead pirate than among the graves of those who had led honest lives.

Back to her hiding-place went Victorine, and once more she crouched among the bushes, awaiting the coming of her husband, who she was certain was the one that the sailor waited the coming of.

She found it painful in the extreme waiting, and horror seized upon her at times, nearly causing her to fly from the dread spot.

Now she could almost fancy that the form pacing to and fro was not that of the sailor, but of a spirit from the grave.

Then she thought she could see moving objects about among the gravestones.

But she closed her eyes and nerved herself to stand the fearful ordeal.

She at last heard a step, and opening her eyes saw a man walking along not far from her.

She knew the form and the step of her husband, and a flush of pain came over her, for she realized that he was in the power of the sailor, or else why had he come to that dread place to meet him?

Watching him she saw him pass on to the monument, and the sailor met him.

She heard a few words spoken, yet could not distinguish what was said.

Then she saw a gleam in the moonlight, heard a cry, a moan, and she tried to spring to her feet and rush toward the spot.

But her limbs would not obey the bidding of her will.

She tried to cry out, yet not a sound could she utter.

She could not however blind her eyes to what was before her, and she saw one form bend over and raise another from the ground.

Toward the cliff the man went with his ghastly burden, and to her ears came the sound of the sea dashing against the rocky base.

She knew that the man who had struck the blow meant to hide his deed by throwing the body of his victim into the sea.

She heard the plunge of the body, saw the man stand and look down into the waters and then turn away.

Then she beheld him walk off at a brisk pace, though a halting one.

"It is my husband! He has killed the sailor

and then thrown him over the cliff into the sea," she said, in a tone of horror, as she crouched among the gravestones.

As he passed near and took the broad driveway toward the entrance to the cemetery, she arose and fairly ran along a narrow path that led to the ivy-grown church.

She grasped her cloak and shawl in her hand, and, all in white, running along in her fright and horror, her long hair streaming out behind her, she did indeed look like a being from the spirit world, and it was no wonder that the commodore was struck with terror at beholding her.

Up a pathway leading to the top of the ridge, she went, after leaving the graveyard, while the commodore, with his wooden leg, followed the highway to Beacon Hill.

Thus she arrived a long way in advance, threw off her clothing and sprung into bed, where she lay moaning and shivering like one with a chill.

When her husband had calmed himself sufficiently to enter the room, he found her really ill, and at once gave her some medicine.

But she uttered no word to him then.

She would keep her secret, in all its appallingness, locked in her heart until the morrow.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT BAY.

WHITE-FACED, but calm, Victorine sought her husband's room the next morning.

He started at her entrance, as he sat there in his library, for he had not known that she had risen, and he was thinking of the tragedy of the night before.

He had mounted his horse after breakfast and ridden down to the cemetery, entering its sacred retreat to note if there were was any tell-tale witness of the scene that had been enacted there under cover of the night.

He had seen only a few footprints here and there, and looking over the cliff he beheld no sign of the body of the sailor.

It had gone out to sea with the tide, and so no witness could come up to face him and say that the man had been murdered by him.

The graveyard looked peaceful, and a holy calm seemed to rest upon it under the sunlight.

Down the shore he rode, into the village, and everywhere he was greeted with a pleasant nod or word.

He heard no rumor of a body being found, and no one suspected him of having taken the life of a human being only a few short hours before.

So to his home he returned, and learning from the servant that his wife was sleeping, he went to his library.

Back in its place he put the money he had taken out for the sailor, and then he sat down to look over some of his papers which needed his attention.

But his mind would not center upon his work and he gave it up, relapsing into a bitter brooding as he settled himself back in his easy-chair.

But Victorine had heard him order his horse and ride away.

She had risen and glided to the window, and saw him enter the cemetery, ride toward the monument of Belmont the Buccaneer, dismount, look over the cliff, and then remount and take the path to the village.

She heard him return and enter the library, and then she dressed herself and suddenly went into the room.

"Why, Victorine, I am delighted to see you up, for I feared you were going to be seriously ill, and I left word for Doctor Roose to give you a call."

"There was no need of it, for the doctor can do me no good."

She spoke in a low, but firm voice.

"Why, my dear, you are still ill, I am sure."

"I will call a servant and send at once—"

"Stop!"

He obeyed her command, for such it was, and she continued:

"Take your seat, for I wish to speak with you."

"What about, my wife?" he nervously asked.

"You shall know in good time, and I expect you to tell me the truth, Rufus Sprague."

"What is all this tragic manner about, Victorine?" and the man became very uneasy.

"Rufus Sprague, you have brought me to bay."

"To bay?"

"Yes."

"I cannot understand you."

"I will make myself very well understood, sir, before I have said many words."

"In the first place you know that I married you out of gratitude, for I told you that I could never love you as I had loved Rafael Rodriguez."

"Why bring this up now, Victorine?"

"For the purpose I have in view."

"Pray let me know what it is?"

"I say, Rufus Sprague, that I became your wife because you saved me from the power of Belmont the Buccaneer, and was so good to me and my child."

"You brought me here, and I almost felt that I should not at least be unhappy, though my love was in the sea with my noble Rafael."

"But you began to live a lie, for you let people believe that you had married a young girl, and that Norma, Rafael's child, was yours."

"I did not like this, for it pained me to have you do so; but I submitted."

"When I married you, and in fact until now, I believed you all that man could be in honor."

"And am I not?" he said sternly.

"No!"

"Do you dare speak so to me, Victorine?"

"Yes, for you have brought me to bay, I tell you."

"I dare tell you that I have discovered that the sailor's story was true, and that you were once a pirate!"

"It is false!"

"It is true!"

"I say it is an infamous lie, and I defy you to bring proof of your words."

The woman smiled sadly and said:

"Don't get excited, Rufus Sprague, for you shall have proof."

"Let me have it."

"All in good time; but let me say that I know that the sailor told the truth."

"Again I ask you for proof."

"Well, let me ask why you made a secret appointment with him at the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer, and at night, if you were innocent of the charge of piracy he made against you?"

The man groaned.

He tried to speak, but could not.

"What does she know?" was the question that burned in his brain.

"I wish you would answer me, senor."

"I paid him to avoid his tongue, to get rid of him."

"And thus placed yourself in his power."

"No, you did not pay him, senor!"

He sprung from his chair and cried:

"What do you know?"

"I know that the money you took to pay him with you brought back."

"I know that the metal that the sailor received from you, Rufus Sprague, was not gold."

"I tell you, senor, that I now have you in my power, for I hold a secret over you that will make you do my bidding."

"Speak, woman, what do you know?" he demanded.

"Enough to hang you," was the calm response.

He dropped back into his chair, and the sweat broke out upon his forehead in huge drops.

"Senor, I wish to make terms with you," said Victorine.

"What terms?"

"I will demand that my child, the daughter of Rafael Rodriguez and myself, be known as she is, not as your child."

"It shall not be."

"I say it shall, for you can say that you had made the assertion at first that she was your child, as you considered it no one's business then; but as she is growing in years, you deem it but justice to her to let the truth be known."

"Say that you rescued her from a pirate ship, Belmont the Buccaneer's craft, and that my husband went down in the wreck of the outlaw vessel."

"But then tell that you sought me at my home, and that I became your wife after a year had passed from the time of my husband's death."

"You must do this, Rufus Sprague."

"No!"

"And you must do more."

"More?"

"Yes."

"In Heaven's name what more do you demand?"

"I demand that from this day you and I live apart."

"For the sake of peace and to save scandal, I will dwell under the same roof with you, and Norma, nor the servants shall know that there is a separation between us."

"But I abhor you, Rufus Sprague, and you must feel it in your heart, though I will not show it."

"Do you hear?"

"I do, and I will not agree to what you demand."

"Then by the Virgin, Rufus Sprague, you shall hang for murdering that sailor," was the ringing retort of the woman, who was now, as she had said, standing at bay against a man whom she now knew as he was at heart, bold, bad and a murderer.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESULT.

COMMODORE RUFUS SPRAGUE was livid with combined fear and anger, at the words of Victorine.

He knew that she had discovered, in some mysterious manner, that he had killed the sailor.

Did others know the secret?

He must know, and at once.

So he decided to temporize and asked, as soon as he could command self-control:

"Victorine, why do you make this charge against me?"

"Because it is true."

"You accuse me of murder?"

"I do."
 "Whom did I kill?"
 "The sailor who told me that you had once been a pirate."
 "When?"
 "Last night."
 "Where?"
 "In the burying-ground."
 He started, and asked after a moment:
 "Who accuses me of this?"
 "I do."
 "Who else?"
 "No one."
 "Ah! you alone?"
 "Yes."
 "It is your imagination."
 "It is not."
 "I say it is."
 "I say that my eyes saw you do the deed."
 "You saw it?"
 "Yes."
 He laughed, but it was a nervous laugh.
 "I do not know how you can say that."
 "I was in the cemetery."
 "You were there?"
 "I was."
 "I do not believe it."
 "Why?"
 "You would not have the courage to go there."
 "Nor would you, had you not had a deep purpose in view."
 "And that purpose?"
 "Was to pay the man the hush-money he demanded and thus get rid of him."
 "Ah!"
 "But you thought better of your intention after meeting him, so killed him."
 "He attacked me."
 "Ah! you admit killing him, then?"
 "Granted that I did, I say that he attacked me."
 "He would hardly wish to kill the goose that lays the golden egg, senor."
 "What mean you?"
 "He would not know where to get money when he needed it again, if he killed you."
 "Still it is true that he attacked me, and I but saved my life by taking his."
 "Oh, no!"
 "You do not believe me?"
 "No!"
 "It is true."
 "No."
 "Why do you say so?"
 "Because I saw the flash of steel in the moonlight, and it was held in your hand."
 "I saw him fall, heard his cry of death-anguish, and saw you take up his body and throw it over the cliff."
 "If your blow had not been a deadly one he would die in the sea, and the tide would carry off his body, so no one would find it."
 "You saw this?" hoarsely demanded the man.
 "I did."
 "Where were you?"
 "Crouching among the gravestones some hundred feet from you."
 "Hal! yours was then the flying form I supposed to be a spirit?"
 "Yes, for I passed not far from you, and, ere you came, I turned back the sailor from leaving the monument of the buccaneer, for he too supposed me to be a ghost."
 "Were you there alone, Victorine?"
 "Yes."
 "No one was with you?"
 "No."
 "Did any one know of your going?"
 "No."
 "Did you meet any one going or coming?"
 "No."
 "I cannot believe that you did it."
 "My dirt-bedraggled white dress, my shawl and cloak, lie in a heap in my room, where I threw them on my return."
 "And you do not believe that I killed the man in self-defense?"
 "I know that you did not."
 "How came you to follow me, Victorine?"
 "Because I suspected that you were playing me false."
 "How?"
 "In telling me what you did about the sailor, and so I decided to get a hold upon you, to force you to do as I asked about my child."
 "I got a stronger hold than I thought, for I can hang you."
 The man had become strangely calm, and the woman had gotten excited.
 After a short silence, he said:
 "Well, Victorine, tell me what you wish, for I have no desire to hang."
 "I wish my child to be known as Rafael Rodriguez's daughter, and to bear his name—that of Norma Rodriguez."
 "Well?"
 "I wish you to be to me a husband only in the eyes of others, and to let me live to myself."
 "This is all so sudden, Victorine, that I must have time to think."
 "What time do you wish?"
 "A month."
 "To concoct some scheme to get out of it?"

"No."
 "I will give you two weeks."
 "No more?"
 "Not a day."
 "I must submit."
 "You must."
 "Well, I will do as you wish—"
 "Demand!"
 "So call it, then—I will do as you demand, I think; but I wish to think it all over first."
 "I love you devotedly, as you know, and I idolize Norma, and it will be hard to give you both up."
 "I told you the truth as to that man's stories of my piracy, and yet I was weak enough to agree to his demand for gold."
 "I met him, and whether you believe it was an attack on me or not, I silenced him."
 "But for your sake and Norma's, I would have laughed at his threats, but I did not wish a shadow of my past to fall upon you two whom I so loved, and do now idolize."
 "I will yield to you, I think; but I must think it over first, and maybe in that time, when you know all my motives, and have become calm yourself, you will not demand it of me."
 "I will never retract my demand."
 "Two weeks from to-day you give me an answer, and if it be as I wish, all will go well; and if to the contrary, you shall hang, for I swear it."
 "You shall never be known longer as the father of my child, if it comes out that you were a pirate."
 "It may be said that you deceived me, yes; but the daughter of poor Rafael Rodriguez shall not wear the stigma of being the offspring of a pirate."
 "You know the limit of time for your answer, senor, so be prepared, for I shall act promptly if you do not do as I have said."
 "I will try and act for the best, Victorine; but you are ill now, so return to your room and let me ask the doctor to come and see you."
 "I will, for I am not well," she said, and she passed her hand across her brow, and as she rose to leave the room she tottered.
 But she waved him off as he stepped forward to her aid, and said:
 "I will go alone; but you can send for the doctor."
 "I will go for him myself," he said, and he was soon after mounted upon his horse and on his way to the village.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DEATH AND A BRIDAL.

DOCTOR ROOSE had been only a few years practicing medicine in the town of G—. No one doubted his ability as a man of medicine and a skillful surgeon; but it was whispered that he had been forced to leave the city, where he had had an extensive practice, and seek a home far away on account of a mania he had for gambling.
 He was a natural gambler, betting upon all occasions that offered for a wager to be made.
 As he was universally unlucky, he could barely keep money enough for the necessities of life, and his little home was poorly furnished, and the two old servants who looked after his comfort whispered about that the doctor's table was often very scarce of good things to eat.
 He was a young man, scarcely over thirty, with a fine form, a striking face, and yet there rested upon his countenance a look as though he was always striving for something he could never get.
 He was seated in his office when Commodore Sprague rode up, and almost a look of alarm swept over his face, while an imprecation came from his lips, but against whom it was not loud enough to hear.
 "Doctor, I have come for a talk with you," said the commodore as he entered the office.
 "Be seated, sir," replied Doctor Roose in a dejected sort of way.
 "I wish to have no one else to hear."
 "Weston is out skirmishing for wood on the hills, and his wife has gone down to the village to get some things, so we are alone, sir."
 "Doctor, you once told me something of your life."
 "I made a partial statement to you, Commodore Sprague, as I needed money."
 "Let me see if I can recall it now, as you told it to me."
 "For what purpose, may I ask?"
 "A good one."
 "Indeed?"
 "Yes, I wish to help you."
 "You have done so, sir, and I illy repaid your kindness."
 "Well, let us see what can be done again."
 "In what respect?"
 "You shall soon know."
 "As I understood your story, you came to me a year ago and said that you dearly loved a young lady in Boston, to whom you were engaged, and who you knew loved you."
 "Yes, sir."
 "You said that you had been anxious to marry her, but that you had never laid up money enough to fit up your house handsomely, and that her father would not give her to you until

you had a pleasant abode, your own, to take her to, and also had a good paying practice.
 "Am I right?"
 "You are, sir."
 "That you had to delay the marriage, though your crime of betting, for such were your words, was a great sorrow to you, and you asked me to let you have money enough to buy a home, furnish it and thus bring your bride here."
 "You promised that you would never gamble or make a wager after you were married, and could soon pay me back."
 "I did."
 "I was deeply grateful to you, as I looked to your care and nursing as the cause of saving the life of my child Norma, when she was so ill, and so I gave you the money to purchase a home and furnish it, with a balance for your wedding present and expenses."
 "You bought your house, furnished it, and then went quietly to get your bride."
 "There you were tempted, gambled away your money, risked more and lost it, and, to save yourself, had to sell your house and furniture and leave your intended bride to mourn your downfall."
 "It is too true, sir."
 "You came back here and confessed all to me, and again set to work."
 "You promised to pay me back, and not a dollar have I had."
 "I have tried to win largely with what I have earned, and so have lost, sir."
 "Well, you will so continue to do, as long as you gamble as you do."
 "Why, you make a large income, and here you are living in a wretched place and barely getting a living for yourself."
 "It is too true, sir."
 "Now, doctor, I said I wished to help you."
 "You are most kind, Commodore Sprague."
 "Not kind, but selfish, for I expect you to help me."
 "In any way that I can, sir."
 "You owe me several thousands now?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "Well, I am willing to invest more on you."
 "Ah, sir."
 "You know the Withers mansion, which I bought?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "It is a house than which there is none finer in the town."
 "True, sir."
 "It had just been overhauled, refurnished, and put into perfect order for the return of the family, when news came that the captain, his wife and children, had gone down in their vessel."
 "A sad thing it was, sir."
 "Yes, but I got the place cheap thereby, and I intend to give it to you."
 "Oh, commodore."
 "I intend to give it to you, but let it appear as though you bought it for cash, having gotten a small legacy from some one."
 "The money you owe me I shall give you also, and—"
 "But, commodore—"
 "Hear me, sir."
 "I am all attention."
 "I will also add to that a couple of thousand dollars, and you can then go to Boston and get your bride."
 "You overwhelm me, my dear commodore, and especially just now, as I had word from my lady-love that her parents intended to force her to marry a rich merchant, as they did not believe I would ever have a dollar."
 "This comes just in time, then?"
 "It does, sir; but why are you thus kind to me?"
 "I said for a purpose of my own, Doctor Roose, and a selfish one."
 "Ah, yes, I remember now that you said so."
 "What I wish you to do in return, you can readily perform."
 "If in my power, sir."
 "It is."
 "Then tell me what I am to do."
 "You pledge your word to do as I ask?"
 "I do, sir."
 "In consideration for which I forgive you the debt you owe, present you with the home I referred to, and hand you in cash the sum of two thousand dollars?"
 "I do, sir; but I cannot understand now anything I can do, Commodore Sprague, to repay you for the very great kindness you show me."
 "Well, I will explain, for if you consider yourself well paid for your work, why I will be satisfied to have given you all I promised, when that work is done to my liking."
 "You have but to name it, sir."
 "I have your pledged word?"
 "Upon my honor, sir."
 "Very well, let me tell you my wish," and the commodore drew closer to the doctor and talked to him for a long time in a low tone.
 The face of the man of medicine showed surprise intense, and at times flushed and paled, and he gazed upon the commodore in a startled kind of way.
 At last the commodore said:
 "You know my wishes, sir, now mount your

horse and go with me to see my wife, who, as I told you, is ill."

The doctor arose, and, after some little hesitation, obeyed.

He seemed to be under a master hand, without power to disobey.

So he went to Beacon Hill and found Mrs. Sprague suffering from a severe attack of nervousness, and so prescribed for her.

But rumors flew about that the beautiful mistress of Beacon Hill was very ill, and some nights after a pail fell upon the community, for Victorine Sprague was reported dead.

The morning following there were sad faces in G—, for the beautiful woman had been loved by all, and deepest sympathy was felt for the sorrowing husband and little Norma.

In the burying-ground, among the ashes of the Spragues, a grave was dug for the dead wife and mother, and the gloom of death rested upon Beacon Hill.

But the sudden ending of poor Victorine's life was temporarily forgotten by the villagers, who had another cause of topic in the coming to their village of a bride.

That bride was the wife of Doctor Loyd Roose, who had bought an elegant home, to the surprise of the villagers, and then, after an absence of a few days, had astonished them by bringing her to it as his wife.

And more, the gossips said, the doctor no longer gambled in any way, and seemed fairly to idolize his lonely bride, who had so long forgiven him his sins and remained true to him.

Thus, in the coming of the bride of Doctor Roose, the dead wife of Commodore Sprague was almost forgotten.

CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

YEARS have passed since the passing away of poor Victorine, and in that time changes have come upon G— and its people.

The town has slowly improved, and there is a greater air of thrift among its people.

Beacon Hill looms up grandly, and is pointed to as the most elegant home in the place, while Overlook Manor has an occupant in one of its masters, a sea-captain, young, handsome and dashing, who dwells there when his fleet brig, of which he is owner and master, is in port.

The other master, for the property is supposed to belong to the two brothers, Basil and Robert Brent, is away at sea, a lieutenant in the United States Navy.

Doctor Roose has kept his pledge to gamble no more, and dwells in the house given him by Commodore Sprague, while a family of children are growing up about him; but there are some who think that the doctor has a hidden sorrow.

Commodore Sprague seems just the same.

A trifle stern, yet his face betrays not his thoughts, and all say that the very idol, of his life is Norma, his daughter grown into beautiful womanhood.

With his wife in her grave Commodore Sprague had never made known the secret of the birth of Norma.

Than Norma Sprague no more beautiful girl dwells in G—.

She is lovely in face, graceful in form, refined, educated and with a character that is a pure as a pearl and true as steel.

When a mere girl, before reaching her teens, Beacon Hill caught fire one night, and, but for Robert Brent, then a young sailor, she would have met a fearful fate.

But he had saved her life, and from that time a romantic attachment it was said had existed between them.

Robert Brent was said to be very rich; but just what he was worth no one knew, and Commodore Sprague had raised no objection to the friendship of Norma and the young sailor, who had come to own his vessel, had become its master and was looked upon as the proprietor of Overlook Manor, for in the absence of Basil Brent few thought of him.

In fact Basil had been away so long in the service, that but for the stories now and then of his gallant deeds he would have been forgotten almost.

The port that Bob Brent, as he was called, sailed from was Boston, and there it was whispered that he was inclined to be a little fast; but no rumors of this ever reached the good people of G— and he was looked upon as a perfect paragon among the honest villagers.

Having told the reader how matters stood at G— and among those there who have figured in these pages, I will take them on board of a small vessel that is standing into the little port one pleasant afternoon, about the time that Norma Sprague was turning the heads of all the young men, and who were terribly envious of Captain Bob Brent who was looked upon as certainly the successful suitor for her hand.

The vessel was a schooner, and a coast packet, and was putting into G— to land a passenger and some freight.

The passenger stood aft, regarding the scenery as the vessel glided along close inshore, and near him, at the wheel, was the skipper of the craft.

There are two handsome houses on yonder ridge, sir," said the passenger.

"Yes, stranger, them be two of the finest houses in all these parts, though one hain't fixed up fine as it might be, seeing as its owner is a sea captain and spends most of his time on blue water."

"That one to the right," continued the loquacious skipper, glad to get a chance to talk, "is Overlook Manor, and it has many a fine acre around it."

"It belongs to two brothers, Basil and Bob Brent, one in the navy and a daring fellow, too, they say, and t'other captain of as fine a brig as floats, and he sails in the West Indian trade."

"It is a pity that neither are at home to enjoy their fine home," said the passenger.

"They do say that Captain Bob do intend to soon give up the sea and git married."

"Does you see the other place?"

"Yes, and it is a superb house."

"It is, and belongs to the father of the young lady they say Captain Bob Brent is going to marry."

"You see that is Beacon Hill, and the master of it was an old privateer captain, and he it was who captured and hanged to the yard-arm the buccaneer Belmont, many years ago."

The stranger started, and his face changed color; but he replied, calmly:

"Indeed! what was his name?"

"Rufus Sprague, but they call him commodore now, seeing as how he lost a leg in the fight with Belmont the Buccaneer, and retired from the sea."

"And he lives there?"

"Yes, at Beacon Hill."

"With his family, I suppose?" and the stranger tried to speak with an air of indifference.

"With his darter only, stranger, for his wife died long years ago, and she was a beauty, too, for I remember her sweet face and pleasant manner to this day."

"But there was a sad look back into her eyes, and it seemed to me that she wasn't just happy, though she had a elegant home, a loving husband and pretty little darter."

"Is you interested in my talk, stranger, for if you hain't, I can shut up?"

"Oh, no; don't stop, tell me all, for I like to hear you talk."

"And the commodore's wife is dead, you say?"

"Yes, stranger, she died long, long ago."

"And she left but one child?"

"Yes, a little girl, but now grown to be a beautiful young lady, even more beautiful than was her ma, and it's her as it is said Captain Bob Brent intends to marry."

"It is true, then, the story I heard, that, believing me dead, she married the gallant officer who rescued her from Belmont, the Buccaneer."

"Oh, Heaven have mercy! after all these years I find her dead, yes, twice dead, for she has been as a wife to another," and the passenger leaned over the high bulwark, while his face writhed with the anguish he suffered—for the passenger was Rafael Rodriguez!

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOR REVENGE.

THE face of Rafael Rodriguez was turned away from the skipper, and he therefore did not show the depth of emotion which threatened to overcome him.

Then, too, the skipper did not see why his story should affect a passenger, and was therefore not watching his countenance.

For some moments neither spoke, the captain of the packet schooner devoting his attention to following the channel into the harbor, and Rafael Rodriguez gazing upon the house where his wife had dwelt, the place where his daughter still lived, with a look that it was hard to fathom.

He had been divided from them for many years, parted, it was believed by them, by death, and in all that time his thoughts had been upon his wife and child.

His shipwreck, his stay on the island, building a little vessel to escape in, a second time wrecked, departure in a small boat and being picked up at sea, working his passage toward home, to be captured by a Mediterranean corsair, sold into slavery in Morocco and long desert captivity, escape through the love of the sheik's daughter, return home, meeting with Cespedes, going after the pirate's treasure, and at last, with wealth untold, starting out to find his wife and little daughter, all his dangers and triumphs swept before his vision and were stamped like a map upon his brain.

Now he had traced them, for step by step he had done his work well, until at last he had found out in Boston that Captain Rufus Sprague, commander of an American privateer, had long years before captured and hanged Belmont the Buccaneer, and afterward had married a rich Cuban lady and brought her to his home at G—.

So to G— he took passage on the packet schooner, and from the lips of the honest old skipper had heard that which seethed through his brain and sunk deep into his heart, piercing it with anguish.

"What kind of a man is the commodore?" he at last asked the skipper.

"Rich as a lord, sir, and a splendid man, who

always has his hand ready to help a shipmate in distress," was the response.

"And his daughter you say is very beautiful?"

"As beautiful as an angel, sir, and true as steel."

"And she is to marry a young man, who you say dwells in yonder handsome old house?"

"So it has been logged, sir, and his name is Captain Bob Brent, and he's rich; but he's home so little he don't keep the old place fixed up as he might; but I guess as he's going to marry the beauty of the village he'll put it in order now, for he's got the money to do it."

"But do you see, stranger, that monument yonder in the little burying-ground—the one off to itself?"

"I do."

"It's the monument as somebody put up over the grave of Belmont the Buccaneer."

"A monument over the grave of that accursed demon?"

"Who dared to thus outrage humanity by such an act, erecting a tomb over that black-hearted fiend?"

The skipper fairly started at the fierce words of his passenger.

He was surprised at this outburst of passion from the quiet stranger.

"Folks tell, stranger, as how it was the work of evil spirits; but nobody knows."

"Evil spirits?"

"Yes, stranger."

"They were indeed evil spirits to honor that sea murderer with a monument."

"They say as how spooks did it, you know."

"Spooks?"

"Ghosts, spirits or spooks, for they is all akin."

"Nonsense."

"Maybe, stranger, but there's the monument and nobody as I never heard tell or knows how it got there."

"When was it put there?"

"Long ago, and by night."

"No one saw it done?"

"Not a soul."

"Was it not made in the town?"

"No, but one morning, after a heavy storm it was seen there."

"It was done by night?"

"Yes, and in one night, and no trace left of who did it, so its set down to evil spirits."

"And the villagers allow it to remain?"

"They do?"

"This is an outrage."

"It has on it a curse to any one who disturbs it, and folks are skeered ter touch it even."

The passenger gazed fixedly upon the monument and remained silent.

Eagerly he watched the shores as the Packet glided up to the town to an anchorage, and then went ashore and put up at the best tavern in the place.

For several days he hung about the village, taking long walks along the ridge, going by the mansion of Beacon Hill time and again and often spending half a day in the cemetery.

People saw him even going to the cemetery at night and wondered at his daring.

Who he was no one knew; but he had the best room at the hotel, paid liberally for all he got and no one questioned why he had come there.

One afternoon as he was returning from the cemetery he came face to face with Senora Sprague.

She was indeed a beautiful girl, and looked most lovely in her pretty walking suit and sun hat.

He started as he saw her, half stopped, partly turned and then went on toward her.

It was just at the rectory gate and she was going to visit the inmates.

He stepped forward, as her hand was upon the gate and opened it, while he raised his hat and bent low.

"I thank you, sir."

"Good-evening," and she spoke in a frank tone, her voice being most musical.

Every tone sunk into his heart.

He was face to face with his own child, he had last seen when an infant almost.

His heart was full to overflowing, and he ventured on as though he would betray himself.

Almost instantly he turned back and retraced his way to the graveyard.

He had caught glimpses of Norma before, as she rode by in her carriage with the commodore or dashed along the road mounted upon her spirited horse.

But he had never before met her face to face, and he felt himself almost overcome.

"She is happy with the man she believes to be her father, so why disturb her dream of joy?"

"Her mother, my wife, lies in her grave, and my child is soon to wed a noble young man, from all accounts, so I need not jar their happiness by my presence."

"I have suffered in the past, so I will suffer on, in silence, and await the end of my time with serene contemplation."

As Rafael Rodriguez spoke he came to a halt at the side of a monument, for he had entered the cemetery.

He stood an instant with bowed, uncovered head, for he was by the grave of his wife.

But suddenly his face became livid, and he hissed forth:

"By Heaven but why should not I be avenged for what I have suffered?"

"It is said that Conrado the Corsair was the Lieutenant of Belmont the Buccaneer and he yet lives."

"I will be avenged, for I will live alone for revenge from this day."

"Ha! ha! bold sea-robbers and fiends, I follow in your wake, for what I have been made to suffer at your hands!"

He had spoken in a voice of frenzy; but calming himself suddenly he laid his hand upon the tomb and said in a low, quivering voice:

"I swear it!"

Then he bent over and kissed the cold stone and at once wheeled and walked rapidly back to the village.

The next day he returned to Boston and started upon his work of revenge.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LIVING TWO LIVES.

How little we know of the lives of our fellow-beings in this world, has been often proven, and daily news comes to us even in these advanced days of civilization of the dual lives led by many of our friends whom we regarded as all that was true and noble.

So it was with Captain Robert Brent, who commanded as fine a vessel as ever sailed the seas, and who was looked upon as the soul of honor, while his daring as a commander and his nautical skill were the gossip of his native place.

"Captain Bob," as he was familiarly known, was a great lover of gold, and he wished to get it for its own sweet sake.

He dearly loved Norma Sprague, but he was also aware that she was an heiress, and he felt that it would be a fine thing indeed to handle the old commodore's vast riches when he had passed away.

Then there was another motive for his laying up gold, and that was on account of a knowledge he possessed, which even the "oldest inhabitant" in G— had failed to remember.

It was only the step-brother of Basil Brent, and he did not fall heir, as all believed, to the Overlook estates of the former master.

If he chose, Basil Brent could set him adrift in any world, he well knew, and though people

believed that he (Robert) was half-owner and real master of Overlook, as his brother would never return to claim his share, being wedded to his naval career, the young merchant-captain feared differently.

So it was that he sought to gain a fortune of his own.

To do this more rapidly he took to gambling, and one night lost so heavily that he awoke the next day to the fact that he had gambled away his own riches and mortgaged Overlook, which he had no right to do.

The winner was a comparative stranger in Boston, and reported as being a Southern planter of great wealth.

He was mysterious in his movements, however, and lived to himself in luxurious apartments with his own servants.

At times, he was absent for weeks at a time; but he was a distinguished-looking personage, spent his money lavishly, was courtly of manner, refined, and certainly had the appearance of being a gentleman.

But this *distingue* Southerner was living a double life, and with Bob Brent it was a case of the fly and the spider.

He was cleverly caught in the web of the spider, and was forced to become a tool of the man who had won his riches over the gambling table.

This person, Carl Conrad by name, was in fact a smuggler, and he made use of Bob Brent and his vessel as a means of smuggling costly freights into the port of Boston.

For all of this Bob Brent received a handsome remuneration which enabled him to be looked upon as the possessor of a very large fortune, and he received credit for able investments and success at speculations among those who knew of his rapid increase in wealth.

Having cleared Overlook Manor of its mortgage, which he had no right to give, and freed his vessel, he began to regard himself as on the highway to fortune, and looked forward to soon claiming Norma Sprague as his wife, when he would give up his evil ways and settle down.

But his master, Conrad, willed otherwise, and emboldened by his success in smuggling, determined to go back to his old trade of piracy, for in the past Carl Conrad had been none other than Carlos Conrado, the lieutenant and trusted friend of Belmont the Buccaneer.

He had been absent from the schooner at the time of Belmont's battle with Captain Sprague and capture by him, and so had escaped.

He had tried to reform, trying to bury his past under the monument which he had mysteriously erected one night to his old chief and friend, and yet circumstances had driven him again to a lawless life upon the sea.

From his home at times in Boston, he was able to glean much information which enabled him to pounce upon richly-freighted vessels and rob them.

From smuggling therefore he boldly launched out once more into piracy, compelling Bob Brent to still serve him, and, of course, to serve himself as well, in selling pirate booty.

It was while thus being the receiver of pirate booty that Bob Brent was startled one day, when home from a voyage, by the return of his brother Basil.

He saw with regret that Basil had grown into a superb specimen of manhood, and had an address that was most fascinating, for he dreaded his flashing uniform and winning ways upon Norma.

He had never asked Norma to be his wife, and yet had felt that she understood it that she was to be.

But he had delayed too long, for a few weeks at home showed him that she had learned to love his brother.

And Basil loved her, thus being the successful rival of Bob, though to his credit be it told that he did not know that his brother loved Norma, while she said that he had never asked her to marry him.

Thus was Bob Brent placed in a wicked frame of mind, and the more as Basil told him that he would divide with him in the property left by his father, though all was his, but that he meant to fit Overlook up and make it his home.

With his dream of love, of riches, of being sole master of Overlook dashed to the ground, Bob Brent became absolutely wicked in his hatred of his brother, and of one other, Carlos Conrad, whom he wished to get rid of, as a man who held him at his mercy.

And so, to rid himself of his brother, thus leaving the field of love again free to him, and to end the days of Conrad, and thereby take from his path his master, Robert Brent concocted a daring and cunning plot, which the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGER TO THE RESCUE.

A MAN of imposing appearance sat at a small table in a wine *cafe* in the port of New Orleans, sipping a glass of wine.

Though dressed in the garb of a common seaman, he yet had the appearance of being one who was more at home in the uniform of an officer.

His face was darkly bronzed, and was strong in every feature.

In fact it was a very handsome face, and his attire did not hide his splendid physique.

His eyes were dark, piercing and seemed to look through every person that they fell upon.

There were but half a dozen others in the wine room, and one of these was seated in a corner, out of the light from the lamps.

He too was a striking-looking personage, dressed in sailor garb, and had before him a bottle of wine, but seemed more intent in glancing over some letters than in emptying his glass.

From time to time his eyes would be raised from the papers he held and fall upon the face of the first mentioned individual and he would nod his head as though satisfied with the current of his thoughts.

Presently three others came into the *cafe*.

They entered noiselessly and took seats at a table behind the man just referred to.

The other saw that their eyes rested upon him, and, from their manner he drew the inference that they had seen him from without, noticed how he was sitting and that there was an empty table behind him.

They were not in sailor garb; but looked like rough, bold fellows who were ready to do any work that came handy, provided gold was gotten by it.

They motioned to a waitress and ordered wine, and thus they sat and drank, evidently waiting for something they felt must happen.

One by one those scattered about the room arose and left the *cafe*, and few remained other than the very distinguished looking stranger, the sailor over in the shadow and the three late comers.

The waitress looked tired and sleepy, for the hour was late, it being after midnight, and the landlord nodded at his desk.

Suddenly the stranger arose, and as he did so, with one accord it seemed, the three rough-looking men sprung upon him.

Taken from behind, given a blow that almost stunned him, seized in the grasp of three strong men and his hands bent behind him and quickly ironed, the man was almost instantly a prisoner.

But he called out in a voice that rung like a trumpet:

"What means this outrage, you devils?"

"It means, Captain Conrado, that we can get a big price for your head," was the low reply of one of the men who appeared to be the leader.

"Hands off! I'll see fair play here!"

The words came from the sailor over in the corner, and he suddenly confronted the three men.

There was a muttered oath from one, a cry of angry surprise from another and the third was quick to act, for he drew a knife and sprung upon the sailor.

A pistol-shot rung out, a groan, a heavy fall, cries of alarm, and then another report from a

weapon in the hands of one of the two men who cried savagely:

"Kill him mate, for we must not lose our game."

But he missed killing his victim, a wound only being the result.

At the same time he fell under a shot from the sailor, and, as he writhed in agony with the wound, his companion was tripped up by the handcuffed man whom they had attacked, who at the same moment felt his arm grasped strongly and heard the words:

"Come with me!"

He obeyed and they darted out of the *cafe* almost unseen in the smoke, dust and confusion.

"You must run for it!" cried the strange sailor.

"Yes, and come to my boat and we are safe," was the reply.

Like the wind they darted along, and reaching the river, found a couple of men there with a boat alongside the bank.

"Spring in, quick!" cried the man in irons.

But the sailor reeled and fell.

"Up with him, lads, for he is wounded, and I fear badly."

"He got it in defending me, and then pull for the schooner, for see, I am in irons!"

The two men raised the limp form of the strange sailor, placed him in the boat, the one who gave them the order followed, and they then pulled rapidly away in the darkness.

In a short while they ran alongside of what appeared to be a coasting schooner.

But once on board the wounded and unconscious man was borne to the cabin, the other following quickly, after giving orders to get the schooner at once under way.

This was done, and while the craft swept down the river under a press of sail, the smith of the schooner was working at the irons on the wrists of his captain, while a surgeon was bending over the unconscious man who had so boldly gone to his rescue.

"How is he hurt, surgeon?" asked the captain, looking over toward the surgeon, who was the one he addressed.

"The wound is not fatal, but bled rapidly, and he fainted from loss of blood."

"I have extracted the bullet, sir, and stopped hemorrhage, so he will revive now," answered the surgeon.

As though to prove the words of the surgeon, the sailor opened his eyes and glanced about him.

"Well, mate, you are in safe hands, so do not worry, for the surgeon says that your wound is not serious," said the captain.

The wounded man passed his hands over his forehead as though striving to recall what had happened, glanced into the face of the surgeon and then at the captain.

Seeing the latter recalled him to himself, and he said:

"Oh, yes! I remember now that I went to your aid when those three men attacked you in the *cafe*."

"You did, and saved my life, too, by your pluck, and I am your friend."

"Who and what are you, may I ask?"

"A sailor without a ship, sir, at present," was the reply.

"Well, you shall have a berth on my vessel, and more, it shall be a mate's place, too."

"I thank you, sir, but I will only take the berth of a seaman."

"You look like one who can command, so I'll make you an officer—there! those accursed irons are off now, so give me your hand, comrade, and let me thank you, for you saved my life, and more, as those men were from my own craft, and had a grievance against me they meant to settle, and you foiled them."

"I am glad that I did, sir, and I will ship as a common seaman with you."

"Well, if you will, have it so; but I'll make you coxswain of my gig, at least, and you need not go on duty until you are entirely well."

"I thank you, sir; but in what service are you?"

"Are you particular, my friend?"

"In what respect?"

"As to the flag you sail under."

"Not foolishly so, sir."

"Well, at present this is a coasting schooner, with odd rig and spars, and weather-stained to fool keen eyes."

"But she has guns in her hold, and three-score gallant fellows in hiding there, and at sea I sail under this flag."

The surgeon had fully dressed the stranger's wound, and he and the smith had left the cabin, so the captain stepped to a locker and took out a roll of black bunting.

"This flag, as you see," he continued, as he unrolled it, "is black, and has a white human skull in the center, while these red letters surrounding it read:

"The World is Mine!"

"Ah! a pirate flag!" cried the stranger.

"Just so; the flag was Belmont the Buccaneer's, and I use it, having been his first luff."

"Your name, please, for mine is Conrado, and you may have heard of me as Conrado, the Corsair."

"I have heard of you, Captain Conrado, and

as I am to serve under a black flag I am glad that you are to be my captain.

"My name is Rodriguez, sir, and I am a Cuban, one time a gentleman, now, as you see, a poor vagabond of a sailor."

Thus had Rafael Rodriguez found the man he sought, he who had been the lieutenant of Belmont the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PLOT TO DESTROY.

WITH revenge in his heart against the dead buccaneer chief, and all who had served with him, for all he had been made to suffer, Rafael Rodriguez had started upon his track to bring his foes to justice.

After leaving G— and feeling that his daughter was at least happy with her supposed father, and in the love of Bob Brent, whom it was said she was to marry, he had returned to his home in Cuba determined to take a new start upon his trail of vengeance.

He had found Cespedes anxiously looking for his return, and the house of Buena Vista in excellent order, everything seeming bright and beautiful to welcome him back.

"But you come alone, dear senor?" Cespedes had said, as the two sat together that night in the grand library of the villa.

Not a word had Rafael Rodriguez said to Cespedes about his returning alone, other than that he had come back for a few days.

The good overseer had seen that all had not gone well with Rodriguez, but he had asked no more until the two were together that night after supper.

"Yes, I come alone," he said, sadly.

"You could not find the senora, then?"

"Yes."

"Indeed, senor?"

"She is dead, Cespedes."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"The noble, beautiful Senora Victorine dead?"

"Yes, I stood by her grave."

"God rest her sweet soul, senor; but how sad to think that one so beautiful had to die."

"It is sad, Cespedes, but she died long years ago."

"And your child?"

"Is now a woman, as beautiful as her mother was."

"Senor, I pray you tell me all, for you know my deep interest in them and in yourself."

"I will tell you all, Cespedes, how I tracked them to the United States, to a village on the Massachusetts Coast, where my wife, believing me dead, had married a gallant naval officer, the same who rescued her from Belmont the Buccaneer, and was brought here to Buena Vista wounded."

"He lost a leg in the action, and fell in love with the Senora Victorine, and who could help it?"

"He asked her to become his wife and she did so, and some years after she died."

"But he made her a noble husband, I believe, and he has reared my child as his own, for some reason, she not knowing that he is not her father."

"Well, Cespedes, there is little more to tell other than that I would not destroy my daughter's dream of peace, break in upon her happiness, by making myself known to her."

"I would not cause the man she believes to be her father pain, after all he did for my wife and for her, and so I did not let her know the secret I held in my bosom."

"I met her face to face, Cespedes, gazed into her glorious eyes, had a smile and a bow of thanks from her for a slight service I rendered, and then, after a prayer and a tear at the grave of my wife, I came away forever."

"But there was an oath that I registered there at my wife's grave, Cespedes."

"I recalled all that I had suffered, and I saw, but a short distance away from where rested her ashes, a monument erected to the memory of Belmont the Buccaneer."

"A monument to a pirate, senor?"

"Yes."

"Near your wife's?"

"Yes, he was hanged by Captain Sprague and buried on shore, in a corner of the little cemetery."

"Then, over his ashes was placed a monu-

ment, and by whom no one knows, but the superstitious citizens there deem it to have been done by evil spirits, for it was reared one night of storm."

"May be it was, senor."

"Nonsense! it was erected by some one who loved the accursed pirate."

"That may be, senor, for no one is so bad, it is said, as not to have some heart to love him."

"Whoever erected the monument loved the man, bad as he was."

"Well, Cespedes, the more I thought of my sorrows and that I had to give up my child and mourn the dead wife, the more revengeful I got, and I determined to strike a blow against those who had wronged me, for the Lieutenant of Belmont the Buccaneer, one Conrado, is now at sea as an outlaw."

"Him I intend to hunt from off the face of the earth."

"I shall strike hard, to utterly destroy him and all who sail under his flag."

"But how can you, senor?"

"I have come home to think, to calm myself, to nerve myself for the duty of love before me."

"Will you fit out a vessel and go in chase, senor?"

"I had thought of that, and yet I believe I can do better by returning than by force."

"I believe you can accomplish what you undertake, senor."

"I am determined to, and, after a short while at home I shall depart to find this Conrado."

"I shall start from Havana, go as a common sailor and do not think I can fail to catch him at some port, by seeking the dens where lawless seamen stop when ashore."

"I wish to carry with me a number of precious stones from my treasure in the vault here, so if I need a large sum it can readily be obtained."

"Then too I wish to make out my papers so that if aught befalls me you can have this place and slaves, and—"

"Oh, senor!"

"I mean it, my faithful Cespedes, and the treasure I will wish you to convert into gold and take it to my daughter, telling her, and Commodore Sprague the whole story of my life."

"I will do it, senor."

"I know that you will, my friend, and so I trust you entirely."

Such was what passed between the Sea Wanderer, as Rodriguez called himself, and Cespedes, and a few days after the papers were all drawn up and signed.

Then Rodriguez, with a fortune in precious gems hidden upon his person, took his departure from Buena Vista Plantation and sailed from Havana, launched upon his venturesome plot to destroy those against whom he had sworn revenge.

Several months after, while in New Orleans, sipping wine in a sailors' *cafe*, chance had thrown Conrado in his way, and the reader has seen how he saved him from capture by the three seamen—saved him to in the end destroy him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT THE COXSAIN OVERHEARD.

FOR some time did the pirate schooner of Conrado skim the seas in its quest of spoils, leaving a red wake to mark its course of crime and bloodshed.

The new coxsain, Rodriguez, had proven himself a man of nerve, a skillful seaman and ever ready to obey the slightest bidding of his superiors.

His captain took a great fancy to him, and yet between the two there seemed to Conrado to be ever a barrier set.

He did not understand Coxswain Rodriguez.

He could not fathom him any more than could his shipmates; but there was never the slightest cause of complaint against him.

He was quiet, reserved, yet polite to all; but no one could claim to know him.

The schooner was not always under the command of Conrado, for that person liked to take his ease ashore, and left his vessel to the command of a trusted officer.

He had offered Coxswain Rodriguez a position as lieutenant often, but the offer had been always refused, though it could be seen by all that the coxsain could make an able commander.

The luxurious tastes of Conrado kept him often in Boston, and there he lived in handsome style, believed to be a wealthy Southern planter.

There was one thing which Rodriguez had discovered since being on board the schooner, and that was that the booty of Captain Conrado was put on board a vessel at certain times, bound into Boston, and there it was disposed of by the captain of said craft, and the proceeds placed subject to the call of the buccaneer chief.

One night Captain Conrado was on board when the rendezvous was reached where the schooner was to meet the merchant brig which was to carry the booty as usual.

There was an unusually rich freight on board, and Captain Conrado was keeping anxious watch for the vessel that was to meet him.

He was the first to sight the vessel, and reported accordingly and the signals were set and answered.

An hour after the two vessels lay side by side, while the rich cargo, stained with infamy, was being transferred from the pirate craft to the hold of the merchant brig.

The captain of the latter vessel was, in the meantime, in the cabin of the pirate, talking with the buccaneer chief.

A decanter of brandy was upon the table between them, and each was smoking a fragrant cigar while they talked.

Coxswain Rodriguez was on duty on the quarter-deck, the officers being busy watching the valuable freight and taking account of it.

No quartermaster was at the wheel, and the coxsain had been told by Captain Conrado to let no one disturb him while the merchant skipper was on board.

Coxswain Rodriguez was curious where Conrado was concerned and so he stood in a position where he was in shadow, and yet could see the two men at the table and hear what was said.

He saw that the brig's captain was a young man.

More, he had a noble face, a fine physique and looked not the man to be in league with a pirate to sell his booty for him.

Upon the table were several bags of gold, and another of jewelry, and Captain Conrado was saying:

"I shall turn this jewelry over to you also, Brent, and you can dispose of it, for I do not wish the slightest suspicion to fall upon me in Boston."

"You do not mind me," said the other with a sneer.

"You deal with the Jew, so he alone knows you."

"Yet I take big risks."

"And get big pay, while I take the risks of life and death at sea to get this booty, and at any time may be caught and yard-armed."

"Oh, no! Captain Robert Brent, you get the best of it by far, for you accumulate riches with very little risk."

"Well, I am getting tired of the business and wish to Heaven I could draw out of it."

"You have certainly made a great deal of money through me, since the night you gambled away your property and money to me."

"I have, and I was forced to league with you to get out of a bad scrape."

"Which you have done."

"As far as money goes, yes; but I may be tracked at any moment."

"I have to pay my crew big money to keep them still, and am in constant fear some one may prove a traitor."

"You must take risks, Brent, if you expect to make a fortune by the way you are doing."

"Well, I hope to get out of it soon, for I have other matters on hand; but your schooner seems badly cut up."

"She is, for we were in action with a cruiser, and barely escaped."

"I shall take a run down to the coast of Maine, where I know a good hiding-place, and a sandy shore I can beach her on and repair damages."

"You dare not enter port?"

"Oh, no; for I fear it would be too risky."

"I shall run my vessel to the place I speak of, and then come to Boston for what I need to fit her out and store her."

"You will come alone?"

"With a boat's crew, who can take back a craft I will charter to carry what the vessel needs."

"And you will be at your rooms in town?"

"Yes, for some little time, until the schooner is ready for sea again, I suppose."

"I will see you there, then."

"Do so, and bring the gold for the loot with you, and we can talk over matters."

As he spoke Captain Brent arose, and Rodriguez glided away from his position as an eavesdropper.

But what he had heard caused his face to become livid, for the name of the brig was the same as he had discovered when in G—, was commanded by the young man who it was said was to marry Norma Sprague, his daughter.

"His name was Robert Brent, and this is the same man."

"My God! what a discovery I have made!" came through the hard-shut teeth of Rafael Rodriguez.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE.

In a secluded bay, at that time especially so, for the coast was then most thinly settled, the pirate schooner found a hiding-place in which she could spend a few weeks undergoing repairs.

It was upon the coast of Maine, and no passing vessel would have suspected that the famous outlaw craft of Conrado the Corsair was hiding away among the rock-bound harbors of the coast.

The spot was well chosen, being a small bay, with narrow entrance, surrounding cliffs, and at one point a sandy beach where the schooner could be beached and at low tide have her hull out of water so that she could be repaired.

The heavy guns were taken ashore upon a raft of logs, and the men went into camp near, under shelter of the pines.

A lookout was kept constantly upon the cliff at the end of the rocky arm that formed the bay, and the men were set to work.

Then, in his own boat, and with Coxswain Rodriguez and a crew of four men, Captain Conrado started upon his run along the coast to Boston.

He sailed by night, hiding by day on the coast, for he did not wish to be seen or interfered with.

Portland was passed the first night, some leagues to port, and Portsmouth the second night.

The third brought the boat into Boston and the men were told to seek quarters in a certain inn, where the coxswain would join them, as soon as he had carried the captain's luggage to his quarters.

Once in Boston Conrado the Corsair became Conrad the Southern Planter, and his rooms were certainly most luxurious, and under the charge of a negress and negro valet, who kept the place in readiness at all times to meet their master.

Rafael Rodriguez entered the room with Captain Conrado, who had his own key, and deposited the luggage upon the floor, after which he turned, as though about to depart, when the pirate chief said to him:

"Coxswain, there is something I wish done here in my rooms to-morrow, which I cannot ask an outsider to do."

"Will you do it?"

"With pleasure, Captain Conrado."

"Very well, come in the morning, and I will also have ready for you the list of things I wish you to purchase for the schooner, for you can attend to that for me, as well as chartering a small vessel."

"Yes, senor."

"I will not care to return under ten days, or two weeks, so you can take your time."

"Come, we'll have a glass of brandy together."

The liquor was poured out and the two dashed it off, the captain condescendingly touching the glass of the coxswain with his own.

Then Rodriguez took his leave, but the next morning reported for duty at the rooms of the pirate captain.

What Conrado wished done he set to work upon, and he was left alone in the rooms at his work, while the captain went out to lunch with some aristocratic friends who little dreamed who it was that they honored.

The work was done to the satisfaction of Conrado and then the list was given to him of things needed for the schooner, with gold to purchase them with.

"And the vessel, senor, to bear them there."

"Get a fair craft, and pay half down of the charter money, as I suppose you will have to do, but that is all they will get, as we will scuttle her when we reach the schooner."

"Yes, senor."

"And coxswain?"

"Yes, senor."

"I wish you would tell me something about yourself."

"About myself, senor?"

"Yes, for you are like a dumb man."

"I always speak, senor, when spoken to."

"True; but I want to befriend you."

"I am in no need of anything, Captain Conrado."

"I owe you my life and I wish to prove my gratitude."

"I have tried to promote you and you would not take the berth I offered you."

"I have preferred to be what I am, senor."

"You are not a Spaniard?"

"I am a Cuban, senor, one who once knew better days; but Fate made me what I am and so let me remain."

"You are a strange man, coxswain, and for the life of me I cannot fathom you."

The coxswain smiled.

But it was a sad smile.

But soon after he took his leave.

That night Captain Conrado had a guest to dine with him.

That guest was none other than Captain Bob Brent, the commander of the merchant brig which had received the booty of the pirate.

The two talked together until a late hour, they gambled together, and the merchant captain lost as a stake his handsome brig to the pirate, who needed a new vessel, and had placed a large sum of money against the vessel.

The brig, it was decided, should be taken at sea by the pirate on her return from her next voyage, so that no suspicion could fall upon Captain Brent.

And all this time, concealed in a secure hiding-place, which he had discovered when alone working in the rooms of the pirate, Rafael Rodriguez had overheard all that had passed between the two.

What he heard told him that Robert Brent, the man who hoped to win and wed Norma Sprague, was at heart a villain.

"It shall never be, for I will protect her," he muttered to himself, and the next day he called upon Bob Brent at his hotel.

The result of this call was that several days after, when Conrado sought to find his trusted coxswain, he was told by one of his men that he had been killed in a broil in a sailor's drinking-saloon.

Somehow there flashed upon the mind of Conrado the suspicion that this was not the truth, and he was not a man to take chances where his suspicions of treachery were aroused, so he acted promptly, and the result was that he started at once on his return to his schooner, carrying with him his crew of four men, all of whom seemed to regret the loss of the coxswain.

A cunning man and a bold commander, Captain Conrado lost no time in getting his schooner ready to resist attack, for somehow there would rest in his brain the thought that all was not well, and the sequel proved that his surmise was correct.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PILOT.

WHATEVER was the conversation held between Captain Robert Brent, of the merchant service, and Rafael Rodriguez, the result was that a large brig, unarmed, but with a large crew thoroughly armed, set sail from the port of G— one night and her destination was the Maine Coast.

Off Boston she lay to, and an officer went up to the city in a small boat.

That officer was Captain Bob Brent, and upon his return he was accompanied by a man in sailor garb who was none other than Rafael Rodriguez.

Upon the quarter-deck of the brig watch-

ing the coming of the boat was an officer of striking presence, for he was dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant in the United States Navy.

His face was fearless, intelligent and strongly marked was every feature.

His form was elegant, his movements decided, but graceful, and he looked the beau ideal sailor and commander.

"They have the pilot, for I see a stranger in the boat," he said to a man near, who was acting as an officer.

In a short while the boat came alongside, and the order came from the naval lieutenant:

"Up to the davits with that boat, men!"

"Lively, for we must lose no time now!"

Five minutes after the boat hung at the davits and the brig was under way, while her crew, of some hundred men it seemed, for there were many, stood forward and amidships conversing in low tones and with their eyes upon the group upon the quarter-deck among whom stood the stranger who had come on board from the shore.

This man was Rafael Rodriguez, and upon going aft with him, Captain Brent had said, addressing the naval officer:

"Lieutenant Brent, this is the man who is to act as pilot, and his name is Rodriguez; or rather, that is the one he is cruising under just now."

"That is my name, senor," was the reply, and Rodriguez saluted the the uniformed officer politely, while Bob Brent continued in a low tone:

"The man says that he can take us in to attack by night in the boats, and, as he has revenge to gratify, I think, brother Basil, you will find him faithful."

"His life would be the forfeit, Bob, if he proved treacherous, answered Lieutenant Basil Brent, whom his brother had insisted should take command of the vessel."

Basil Brent had not been home from sea very long; but in the time that he had been at Overlook he had won the love of Norma Sprague, who was not, as rumor had it, pledged to his brother, though but for his coming doubtless would have one day wedded Bob.

The latter had heard their pledges of love, and more, he had discovered that he himself had no claim upon Overlook, unless in case of Basil's death.

The loss of the woman he loved, with her riches, the failure to gain Overlook Manor, as he had hoped, all for his own, had turned the heart of Bob Brent black with jealous rage and hatred, and so it was that Rafael Rodriguez, in his call upon him, had found him in excellent humor for any wicked deed.

Rafael Rodriguez saw a chance to capture the pirate schooner and crew, and hang Conrado, and Bob Brent was to be used as a tool.

The latter saw a chance to capture the vessel and chief, thus gaining fame, and safety for himself through the death of Conrado, and saving his own brig which had been won by Conrado.

He also saw a chance to have his brother lead the expedition and thus lose his life, leaving the field again to him to win Norma Sprague back, and also to get Overlook, and so he considered Rafael Rodriguez his tool.

With supposed generosity he had urged his brother to take command, and he was to remain on the brig, for he cared not to be seen by Conrado either before his capture or after it.

He had also arranged with Rafael Rodriguez, who played his game well, to see that Captain Conrado was killed early in the action, and that a sly shot should end the days of Lieutenant Basil Brent, so that he never would return alive from the attack.

Thus it was plot and counterplot between the two, with the Cuban having the master man, for he was not a villain, and he knew Bob Brent certainly to be one.

"Well, my man, my brother tells me you can pilot us to the hiding-place of Conrado the Corsair?" said Basil Brent as he met Rafael Rodriguez.

"I can, sir."

"You know that he is hiding on the coast?"

"Yes, sir."

"What doing?"

"Repairing damages, sir, and fitting out."

"How do you know this?"

"I left the vessel only a short while ago."

"Ah! you are a pirate then?"

"Seemingly so, sir; but I joined the schooner to get revenge, and it now seems as though I would gain my end."

"Ah! revenge is a strong motive, and prompts many a man to bold acts."

"But I think you will be gratified now, for, though this brig is not armed it is manned by as gallant a lot of young seamen as ever trod a deck, and they are all known to both my brother and myself, being from our native town."

"They are doubly armed, and we have ample boats for the attack, for I believe you said it would have to be a boat attack?"

"Yes, sir, for we can creep in by night upon the schooner, which is undergoing repairs, as I said, and can be surprised and taken."

"About what crew has this bold pirate?"

"Seventy men, sir."

"Well, I have more, and we will take him."

"Now make yourself comfortable in the vessel, until we need your services," and beckoning to his brother to follow him Basil Brent descended to the cabin.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER THE ATTACK.

THE brig approached the rock-bound coast by night, an anchorage was found a league away from the little harbor where the pirate schooner lay hidden, and the boats started to the attack, Rafael Rodriguez as pilot, in the lead.

Upon the brig Bob Brent remained in command with a few men under him, sufficient to man the vessel if need be.

The attack was made, and soon after the boats came back at full speed, and not all that had started on the expedition either.

The attack had failed. Conrado seemed to have been prepared for an attack, so was not surprised, and had driven back his assailants.

And so it was that the boats came back, shattered, and with dead and dying men in them.

But there came to Bob Brent, brought by Rafael Rodriguez, good news, for he told how he had shot down Conrado the Corsair himself, and had seen Basil Brent fall dead upon the pirate's deck.

Away fled the brig back to the port of G—, and in his heart Bob rejoiced.

Off Boston the strange pilot went ashore, and the defeated expedition went in to G— to break the sad news of their having been beaten off, and that a score of their number had been slain, while many more were wounded.

And deep was the gloom that fell upon the little town, and the grief that pierced the heart of Norma Sprague when she heard that her noble lover had fallen.

With his brother dead, Bob Brent felt that he could win Norma, for she was by no means indifferent to him he knew.

With Basil dead, Bob Brent was master of Overlook Manor, and, excepting the secrets that weighed upon his soul, of his hand in the affair, all looked joyous to him in the future.

But he felt that he must meet his appointment at sea with the pirate schooner, for though Captain Conrado was dead, he had an able lieutenant in Senor Moralez, who would doubtless continue to rove the seas as a buccaneer.

Yes, he, Bob Brent, would get away from the sad face of Norma Sprague, go on another cruise in his beautiful vessel, meet the schooner and sever all ties with pirates, after he had sold one more cargo of booty, and then settle down at Overlook Manor and make the fair young mistress of Beacon Hill his bride after her year of mourning for his lost brother.

And so it was that Captain Bob Brent again went on a voyage, one that would keep him away longer than was his wont to stay, and upon his return he saw a hope that his dreams of love and riches would meet with a full realization.

But Rafael Rodriguez?

He had, as he had said, shot Conrado, and seen Lieutenant Basil Brent fall upon the pirate deck.

Then he had just been able to spring back into the boat and escape, knowing

that the attack had utterly failed as the buccaneer had been prepared for them.

He believed that Conrado was dead, and he certainly hoped so.

He felt certain that Lieutenant Basil Brent was dead.

And so he returned to Boston and sought the rooms of the buccaneer chief.

Having worked there he was known to the servants, and he readily told a story that gained him full access, and he made what searches he wished through the private papers of the chief to carry out his own ends.

Then he disguised himself and once more sought G—.

For days he lingered there, to accomplish a purpose, and then, without betraying himself to his daughter as her father, he left G— and several days after sailed from Boston in a south-bound vessel.

But Conrado the Corsair was not dead.

He had received a wound that felled him to the deck, the bullet glancing upon his skull and stunning him for some minutes.

Then he had recovered and his eyes fell upon the form of Basil Brent.

He saw that he was desperately wounded, and as the lantern flashed in his face, recognized him as one he had met before, so had him at once borne to his cabin and placed in the care of the surgeon of the schooner.

Then orders were given to clear the decks, get up anchor and sail to another hiding-place, one nearer Boston.

So it was that some days after, Captain Conrado, as Mr. Conrad, visited his rooms to learn that his coxswain had been there before him. Who he could be Conrado could not guess, and so there was deeper mystery than ever to him hanging over the coxswain.

"I must solve it."

"I must know who this man is," he had said.

But Conrado felt that he could not then remain longer in Boston, and so it was that he returned to his schooner and set sail for his rendezvous, which was an island among the Bahamas.

To that island the scene changes, some months after the boat attack upon the pirate schooner on the coast of Maine.

The island is a safe retreat, for it is difficult of access, and by no means is it an unpleasant abiding-place.

There are some score of rude huts, where the outlaw islanders have their homes, and in the little harbor are several vessels, with topmasts housed to keep them from being seen above the island, should a cruiser pass near.

Upon the slope of a hillside in the shelter of a grove of trees, is a cabin, away from the others.

Before it, resting upon a cot, lies a man, while a boy sits near, half-asleep, and yet waving over him a fan to temper the heated air.

The man on the cot is haggard, thin, and shows evidence of long illness and of having suffered greatly.

His face, however, is recognizable as that of Basil Brent.

Presently a cry is heard from a distant cliff, and a voice calls out:

"The schooner is coming in!"

The boy started, and said, eagerly:

"The chief's coming, sir."

"All right, my lad," was the low reply of Basil Brent, who seemed to show not the slightest interest in an announcement which had greatly excited the dwellers upon the island, for all of them were flocking to the shore.

The schooner referred to was yet a long distance off, but was coming swiftly along toward the island and bringing a good breeze with her.

Following the dangerous channel with consummate skill, two hours after being sighted she ran into the little harbor and dropped anchor.

Her captain, Conrado, hastily rowed ashore and was greeted by a cheer of welcome, to which he returned a polite salute.

Then he asked of a man who came forward to meet him:

"How is the prisoner, Harvey?"

"Better, sir, and improving; but it's been a tight pull for him."

"I am glad to know that he lives."

"I will at once seek him, and I will not forget you for your good nursing, Harvey, for that alone has saved him."

"Thank you, chief, I have done my best," returned Harvey, while Conrado walked rapidly up the slope and soon stood by the cot of Basil Brent.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BUCCANEER'S GRATITUDE.

"SENOR, I am glad to see you better; I assure you, though you have had a hard seige of it since I left you here two months ago," said Conrado as he approached the cot and bowed to Basil Brent.

"It was a close call for me, sir; but the devoted nursing of those you left me in charge of has saved my life," was the low reply.

"I certainly am happy that it is so, for I owe to you more than you imagine."

"You are the pirate chief Conrado?"

"Yes, senor, I am Conrado."

"When you brought me here I was too low to know anything."

"Where am I?"

"Upon my island retreat, Senor Brent."

"Ah! you know me?"

"I do."

"How is that?"

"My recognition of you caused me to have you taken to my cabin and cared for, and I left you here, when I sailed, hoping that you would pull through."

"Why so merciful to me?"

"I will tell you in good time, senor, as you do not appear to recall me."

"I do not, but the past seems like a troubled dream to me."

"You were desperately wounded, senor, several times, fever set in and it is by a miracle that you are recovering."

"I recall that I led a boat attack upon your schooner by night."

"Yes, senor, and a gallant one; but I sighted your vessel at sunset and suspected trouble, as one of my men, reported killed, I feared had deserted."

"So it was that you did not surprise me, and I beat you off, in spite of your splendid courage."

"I fell with a wound in my head, and you dropped upon my deck, as I believed dead, while your boats retreated, badly used up."

"It was an unfortunate affair for us."

"Not as bad as it might have been, senor; but let me now tell you that you once saved my life."

"It matters not when, how or where, or that you did not know me as a pirate, but the fact remains that I owe my life to you, and so it is that I seek to serve you from gratitude."

"You are good to remember a circumstance which I do not now recall."

"It is just as well, senor."

"And you prove that a pirate has gratitude?"

"Yes, senor, I have at heart; but, senor, let me tell you that you are looked upon as dead at your home."

"Ah yes, I suppose so."

"It was reported that you fell dead upon my deck, and all believe it."

"You know this?"

"I do."

"How?"

"I have been there."

"To my home?"

"Yes, senor."

"Where is it?"

"At G—."

"You are right."

"I can tell you more."

"Well?"

"You are master of Overlook Manor, an estate left you by your father."

"Yes."

"You have a half-brother, Robert Brent, a captain in the merchant service."

"I have."

"He remained on the brig the night of your attack on me."

"How know you this?"

"I know much more."

"Well, senor?"

"I know that he returned to G— and soon after set sail in his brig on a voyage."

"What else?"

"I know that Miss Norma Sprague, the daughter of Commodore Sprague of Beacon Hill Mansion, was betrothed to you."

"Who are you that knows all this, man?"

"Conrado, the Corsair, Senor Brent."

"And do you know aught of the lady to

whom you referred—if she believes me dead and grieves deeply for me?" eagerly asked Basil Brent.

"She does believe you dead, senor, and yet has hope that you are not, while she grieves most deeply for you, as her love for you is the one love of her life."

"My God; but how do you know all this?"

"I have been to Beacon Hill, senor."

"You!"

"Yes, senor."

"A pirate at Beacon Hill?"

"Yes, and a guest there, for my character was unknown."

"What took you there?"

"To serve you, Lieutenant Brent."

"How could you serve me?"

"I believed that there was a plot against you, and so I went there, and to G— to fathom it."

"A plot against me?"

"Yes."

"But how could there be?"

"You could little dream how, senor."

"And did you solve it?"

"I did."

"And will tell it me?"

"Not now, senor; but in good time you shall know all, and when you are well enough I will return you to your home, and you will see that, pirate though I am, I have yet gratitude in my heart for a service done me, and that I would not allow the evil to triumph over the good, at least in this case."

Basil Brent gazed at the man in wonder.

He was struck by his handsome, daring face, and said:

"You are not a Spaniard, as your name suggests?"

"No, senor."

"An American?"

"I am; but let us not speak of myself, senor."

"One question?"

"Yes."

"You were with Belmont, the Buccaneer, I have heard?"

"Yes, senor, I was his senior officer, and more, his friend."

"In the cemetery at G— there has been erected over Belmont, the Buccaneer, in a most mysterious manner, a monument."

"Yes."

"Do you know aught about it?"

"I placed it there, senor, to the memory of my friend, Captain Belmont."

"It was a mystery as to how it got there, and by whose hands."

"I had it taken ashore by night, in a storm, from my vessel, and placed there."

"The rain effaced the foot marks, as I expected it would do, and the people believed that evil spirits reared it to Belmont."

"But, senor, I must not let you talk more now."

"You are improving, and in good time I will take you home; but I wish you to fully recover first, and you may be sure that I am working for your welfare, and, though I have you here, it is not to desert you, believe me."

Ere Basil Brent could reply, Conrado had turned and walked quickly away.

The next morning the wounded officer was surprised to find that the schooner had sailed from the island during the night and no one could tell, or would tell, when Captain Conrado was expected to return.

"I must not give up, after all I have suffered and passed through."

"No, I will live, and somehow I feel confidence in that strange man, though how I ever served him I do not remember; but it may be so, for I have served many men in my life, I am glad to say."

"But about this plot against me which he hinted at."

"He must be mistaken there," and Basil Brent resigned himself with what patience he could to bide his time.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RODRIGUEZ AT HOME.

THE Senor Cespedes was greatly gratified one day to receive a letter from Rafael Rodriguez announcing his early return to Buena Vista.

Nothing more did the letter say, and so Cespedes was in doubt as to what the master of Buena Vista had accomplished during his absence.

Eagerly he watched for his return, and to the great joy of the overseer, the master of Buena Vista soon followed his letter.

A delicious supper was spread for him, and after it the wanderer and the overseer sat together in close converse.

Not a shadow upon the face of Rafael Rodriguez portrayed to the overseer whether he had good or bad news to relate.

At last, after puffing away vigorously at his *cigarrita* for awhile, Rodriguez said:

"Cespedes, I gained a certain revenge, but I failed in accomplishing all I wished, yet am glad to say that I made an important discovery."

"Will you tell me, senor, all that you have gone through?"

"It is soon told, my good friend, for I found my man, Conrado, the lieutenant of Belmont the Buccaneer, and shipped in his vessel."

"You were bold, senor."

"No, for I was unknown to the crew, and the risks I ran were worth the result."

"I laid my plans for the capture of the schooner, and all on board, and deserted at the proper time and acted as pilot for an expedition against the schooner, which I knew was in hiding and repairing damages."

"Well, the pirates were not surprised by us, as I had hoped, and we were beaten off, with the loss of our leader, a gallant young naval officer, who fell by my side."

"Finding all was lost, I shot Conrado and sprung back into the boat, and the officer's body, with others of our men, were left on board the pirate."

"I had discovered enough of Conrado's life to know that he was living two lives, one as a pirate chief, the other as a Southern planter in Boston."

"I went to his rooms, and known to his servants, gained access to his strong box and took out certain papers and a locket and ring that had belonged to my poor wife."

"In the locket was her miniature, and he had gotten possession of it by finding Victorine's jewel casket on board the yacht, when we were captured."

"I went then to the town where my child dwelt, and, watching my chance, one day met her beside her mother's grave, and, still unknown to her as her father, I talked to her, and more, I gave her the ring and locket, telling her to remember me as her friend."

"I then departed from G— and getting a small vessel and crew, I went by night, in a pouring rain, and removed the monument that was over the grave of Belmont, the Buccaneer."

"But, best of all, good Cespedes, I discovered that the man my beautiful child was said to be betrothed to was at heart the basest of villains."

"He was plotting to destroy his half-brother, and thus get his estates, and also to get him out of the way so that he could marry my child, who had promised to wed the brother, the young officer who was killed on the pirate's deck."

"And it was this base half-brother that had thus sought to get the gallant lieutenant killed, and in his conversation with me offered me a large sum to shoot him down in action, and also to kill Conrado, thus freeing him from the power of the buccaneer captain with whom he was secretly in league."

"I pretended to play into his hands, and this vile man returned to his home and no one suspects him of being the vile creature that he is."

"He sailed in his brig on a Southern voyage, but is aiming in the end to possess himself of his brother's home and to marry my daughter, for his noble brother, finding out after this engagement that this Bob Brent loved Norma, begged her, in case of his death, to wed him, and received her promise to do so, as I understand it."

"Now, Cespedes, this man must never be allowed to carry out his purpose, and I shall thwart him."

"He is little better than a pirate in actions, and at heart equally as bad, so he must be brought to the end of his rope."

"Then, too, I shall hunt down the schooner of Conrado and bring her crew to the yard-arm."

"To carry out my purpose, I shall get a vessel and fine crew, and never haul down my colors until the end is reached."

"I have therefore returned, Cespedes, to

supply myself with all the jewels needed to raise the gold I must have, and you may rest assured that I shall again start forth with a determination to punish the guilty, protect my child and get revenge for the sorrows that I have been forced to endure for nearly a score of years now, and the thought of which nearly drives me mad."

Rafael Rodriguez had spoken in a low, earnest tone, and Cespedes realized when he glanced into his face how much he was in deadly earnest.

"Ah! senor, if all this wandering life of danger was but at an end how glad I would be."

"But I can well understand that you are not one to give up until the goal of your hopes is reached."

"I never shall, Cespedes, I never shall."

"May all end as you wish, senor, and I pray for; but when do you leave?"

"Almost at once, for I cannot delay now that I have begun the good work."

"I shall leave to-morrow for Havana."

And true to his word Rafael the Wide World Wanderer, as he had become, on the morrow once more started to follow in the wake of his foes, among whom he now numbered Captain Bob Brent.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HAUNTED AT SEA.

CONRADO was too much a lover of gold to neglect the search for it for any other purpose he might have on hand.

So it was that while determined to keep his hold upon Bob Brent, he at the same time plowed the seas in quest of more booty.

One day while cruising slowly along a sail was reported from aloft.

He at once thought of a richly freighted ship and went aloft to examine the stranger through his glass.

The result was not gratifying.

"That is a cruiser and she is as strong, if not stronger than I am," he said to Senor Moralez his first officer upon coming to the deck.

"That is bad, senor; but I hope we can outfoot her."

"Yes, the schooner has not yet lost all of her speed, and I shall not fight unless compelled to."

"It would be best not, senor."

"No, it is gold I want, not iron and steel."

"We have already suffered much, Senor Captain, from actions we were forced into."

"Well, I'll run for it, be that cruiser what he may."

So the schooner was put away in flight.

But it was seen that the cruiser followed steadily in her wake and held her own in speed with the pirate.

Night came on and Conrado determined to dodge the pursuer.

So he took in much of his sail and squared away before the wind for a league.

Then he stripped the schooner to bare poles and lay quietly upon the waters.

He had certainly lost the cruiser, for it was nowhere in view.

Thus the night passed away, and with the dawn Conrado ordered the sail set and the vessel gotten under way.

Suddenly a startled cry rung out, and all eyes turned in the direction to which one of the men pointed.

There was the cruiser, a beautiful brig heavily-armed, and she was lying within range under bare poles.

Her captain had evidently understood the buccaneers' dodge and had done the same, thus waiting until the day dawned and revealed the outlaw craft.

Sail was at once spread upon the pirate, and she went bounding away in flight.

Like magic sail was set upon the stranger and she followed in the wake of the buccaneer, not gaining, not losing, but hanging right where she was when first seen.

The buccaneer chief wondered at this, for he seemed to feel that the vessel in his wake could do better work.

So he set every stitch of canvas that would draw, and the schooner began to forge ahead.

But only for a few minutes, as more sail was set upon his pursuer and the same position astern was maintained as before.

All day long the chase continued, if chase

it was, for the stranger seemed to be able to come nearer did her commander wish.

A strange thing about the pursuer was that she looked more like a phantom craft than a real one.

Her hull was snow-white, her sails also, as though perfectly new, and her spars had evidently been painted white.

About her decks, and in the rigging her men moved and they were dressed in white, appearing like ghosts rather than an able-bodied crew of live seamen.

The craft was a schooner, trim in build, with long spars and tall masts, so that she spread a vast amount of canvas.

She was not near enough for Conrado to see her distinctly in every part, even with his best glass; but she was sufficiently nigh for him to discover that she was heavily armed and well manned, and would therefore be a very dangerous foe to fight.

As night drew on the crew of the pirate schooner began to grow uneasy.

They did not understand this white craft's maneuvering in their wake.

Some began to whisper that their vessel was haunted, for the red deeds it had done.

Bolder men laughed at their superstitious ideas, but from the captain down there was a certain uneasiness felt.

In the darkness the white schooner still held her position.

Try as they might the pirates could not give her the slip.

In every way that he could think of, and they were many, Conrado tried to throw the spectral-looking stranger off his scent.

But like a grayhound, silently she came on.

There was no getting rid of her, and the crew became more and more uneasy, the watch, when turning-in time came, refusing to go below and remaining upon deck.

Dawn came and the strange white schooner was still where she had been the night before.

Conrado was enraged, and several times he thought of waiting for his pursuer and fighting him.

But he dared not risk an encounter unless the greatest need came for it, and so he held on.

He was anxious to head off a couple of richly-freighted vessels he had heard of being about due at a Southern port, and yet he could not do so with this white schooner in his wake.

Thus another day went by and when night came on the pirates were more uneasy than ever before.

Two-thirds of the crew were ready to swear that the white schooner was a specter craft, sent to haunt them upon the seas.

When midnight came Conrado rejoiced to see that a storm was coming up.

During the storm he would escape his dogged tracker.

He could at least try it.

The storm came up rapidly, and the men seemed glad to be called to work.

Sail was taken in quickly, and the same movements were gone through, on the white schooner.

Then, with a rush of waters and howling of winds the storm came upon the devoted craft.

That was the moment that Conrado had hoped for.

He had noted the course of the storm and had taken the exact position of the white schooner.

So, when the first shock of the tempest was over, he wore his vessel round, and under bare poles, with topmasts housed, he darted away before the tempest.

He knew that he must pass very near to the white schooner; but in the darkness, and under bare poles he hoped to escape unseen.

On, on he flew, and in the somberness upon the sea the white schooner was nowhere visible.

For hours the buccaneer craft drove along, and at dawn the sea was scanned by three-score pair of anxious eyes.

But nowhere visible was the white schooner, which had haunted them like a spirit of the sea for days.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AGAIN THE WHITE SCHOONER.

THE sea was yet wild, and the wind blew strong; but the schooner, under storm-sails

set at dawn, drove along with her crew once more breathing freely, for the white schooner was nowhere visible.

Toward noon there came the cry from aloft:

"Sail ho!"

Every man on board the pirate schooner started and looked uneasy.

Out of the cabin at a quick step came Conrado.

In every mind was the same thought:

"Is it the white schooner?"

"Whereaway?" called out Captain Conrado.

"Almost dead ahead, sir, half a point to starboard."

"Ay, ay, what do you make her out?"

"A large brig, sir; but the air is misty and I cannot see very well, sir."

"Ay, ay, I will come aloft with my glass."

Up into the rigging went Conrado, and he leveled his glass at the stranger.

A sigh of relief came from his lips when he saw that it was not the white schooner.

So he called down, as he saw how anxiously his men was waiting:

"It's not the white schooner, Senor Moralez."

A cheer broke from the crew at these words.

Soon after Captain Conrado called out:

"Moralez, it is the Tycoon, the vessel we wished to catch, I verily believe."

"I hope so, sir."

"I will soon be able to tell," he continued and in a short while came the words.

"It is the brig Tycoon."

A cheer broke from the crew, for the vessel had been reported richly freighted.

The sea was running down and the wind lessening in force, but it promised to keep up to a strong sailing breeze.

The schooner was at once crowded with sail and sent after the brig.

The misty air had kept the pirate from being seen by the lookout on the brig until she was within range.

Then the brig started away in rapid flight and all was seen to be excitement on board.

Away sped pursued and pursuer, and all watched breathlessly to note the result.

The brig sailed well, but the schooner gained rapidly.

This brought another cheer from the crew.

They were to be repaid for their alarm about the white schooner by capturing a valuable prize.

Early in the afternoon Conrado ordered a shot fired.

The air was still misty, but the sea was comparatively smooth and the wind was blowing about six knots.

The bow pivot gun of the schooner sent a shot through the mizzen sail of the brig, showing that the pirates were in earnest.

But the brig still held on, as though hoping against hope.

Again a shot was fired and it tore through the brig.

Still the pursued did not come to.

"We can catch him by dark, senor," said Moralez.

"Yes; but we will force him to come to sooner, for we can see what his cargo is better by daylight."

So answered Captain Conrado, and he ordered the firing kept up.

Now and then a shot was seen to do some damage, just what the pirates could not tell; but the brig bore her punishment and kept on.

About an hour before sunset the firing of the buccaneer grew more rapid and deadly in results, and up to her peak was sent her sable flag.

It was the flag which Belmont, the Buccaneer had so long flaunted; a black field, a white skull in the center, and encircling the latter in red letters the words:

"THE WORLD IS MINE."

The brig, as though convinced that she could not escape, had at last come to.

She was not badly crippled to all appearances, but her commander had doubtless decided not to longer risk the lives of his men under the pirate's fire, and to surrender and trust to his mercy.

The buccaneers were wild with delight,

and their cheers reached the ears of those on the brig.

Down upon her prey rushed the schooner, and as she drew near Captain Conrado hailed:

"Aho the brig!"

"Ho the schooner!"

"What brig is that?"

"The Tycoon of Spain!"

A yell came from the pirates.

They knew that they had a valuable prize, from the reports they had had of the brig's freight.

"What cargo have you?"

"Arms and ammunition for Havana."

"What?"

"Arms and powder for the Spanish troops in Havana."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, senor."

"I do not believe you."

"It is easy to search my vessel, Senor Pirate, and discover the truth of my words."

The schooner now lay to near the brig, and a frown came upon the face of Conrado, while his crew looked disappointed.

"You have no other cargo than the munitions of war?"

"No, senor."

"You are the brig Tycoon?"

"Yes, senor."

"You were to have sailed from Spain with a very rich freight of wines, French silks, satins, laces and other valuable goods."

"True, senor, but at the last moment the Vestal, a fleetier brig than this one, was chosen, and we brought the munitions of war in her place."

"Curses on you!" came from Conrado.

Then he added in an angry voice:

"I have a mind to sink you with all on board."

The Spanish captain seemed startled at this, and, after a word with an officer at his side, called out:

"Perhaps, Senor Pirate, yonder craft may prove a more valuable prize than the Tycoon."

He pointed to windward, and all eyes followed his look and gesture.

Instantly a voice on the buccaneer cried in a tone of horror:

"It is the white schooner!"

It was true, for, unnoticed in their anxiety to capture the Tycoon, she had come astern of the schooner and held her place there as before the storm.

The heavy mist had kept her from being seen by the pirates, but they believed that their vessel had been constantly under the eyes of the crew on the white schooner.

Conrado was startled, brave as he was.

The Tycoon, loaded with the munitions of war, had no charms for him, and so he decided to at once take to flight.

"Give that craft a broadside and then set sail," he shouted in trumpet tones.

The pirates obeyed, but the schooner was swinging around as her broadside was discharged and the Tycoon escaped with very little damage.

Another moment and the buccaneer craft was in rapid flight.

"Crowd on all the sail that she will bear!" yelled Conrado.

This was done, and then, as the vessel sped along, he said to his lieutenant:

"We have such a good lead, Moralez, and the night will be misty and dark, so after all we may elude him."

"I hope so, senor," and Senor Moralez showed that he, too, was deeply impressed by the spectral craft following in their wake.

By the Tycoon, which was again under way, the white schooner swept, seemingly not speaking her, but coming directly on after the pirate.

Then night came on; but when dawn followed, the white schooner was still in the wake of the buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EFFECT OF A BROADSIDE.

THE pirates were very nervous over the discovery of the white schooner when dawn came.

They had hoped to have lost her in the darkness, for the night was very dark.

They certainly had not seen her, and supposed that they could not be visible to those on her decks.

That she was within her usual distance of

them in the morning caused their superstitious fears to be aroused the more and they decided that she was indeed a specter craft.

All day long she hung in their wake as before, until at last Captain Conrado, almost unnerved by her presence, determined to open fire on her when night came.

"We can escape better under cover of the darkness, Moralez, if worked."

"You believe her a real ship, senor?"

"Certainly."

Moralez shook his head.

"You do not?"

"No, senor."

"What do you suppose her to be?"

"A shadowy phantom, sir, a spirit craft sent to haunt us."

"Bah! I'll guarantee when you feel her iron to-night you'll change your opinion."

Then the hours passed on until night came.

With the darkness Captain Conrado called the men to quarters.

The weather was unsettled and indicated a storm, and he was anxious to fire a few broadsides into the white schooner and then try and escape if possible.

If he barked the strange craft, well and good; but somehow he feared she would prove more than a match for him.

Still the suspense as to what she was, and her motive for pursuing him, was fearful and he noticed that it was making a deeper and deeper impression upon the crew.

To his surprise when he ordered the men to quarters they did not obey.

"What does this mean?" he shouted.

But his crew stood firm, while Lieutenant Moralez said:

"Captain Conrado, the men will not fire upon a craft that they believe to be a phantom."

Conrado was for a moment perfectly furious.

But he knew that his men were good and true, and that they had never refused before to obey his every order.

"Men, fire two broadsides upon yonder craft, and I will ask you to do no more, if they do not prove that she is metal."

"We will shorten sail and let her come nearer, and give her first one, then the other broadside and note the effect."

"If she still comes on, we will fly as now we are doing."

"If we cripple her, then we will beat her off if we can."

"Men, will you do this for me?"

Conrado was popular with his men.

He had always been a kind commander, and he was known to be as skilled a sailor as went to sea, and as brave as a lion.

He had called upon his men to stand by him for two broadsides, and they would not refuse, and, to a man they went to their guns.

Sail was then shortened on the schooner, and all eyes watched the vessel most eagerly.

For a short while the schooner came on swiftly, and then, as she drew nearer sail was also shortened on her until she dropped back to the speed of the leader.

"Now we are near enough to make our shots tell."

"Let her come around helmsway!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Stand ready at your starboard guns!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Steady helmsmen!"

"Steady 'tis, sir!"

"Starboard guns, fire!"

The schooner reeled under the shock, but without waiting to see the effect of the fire Conrado rapidly gave the orders to hold on the course once more, and then to wear ship and let the white schooner have port broadside.

This was promptly obeyed, and when the smoke drifted away the white schooner was not visible.

Perhaps the flashing of the guns had blinded all eyes momentarily, but no one seemed to see the white schooner, and when they began to search the sea carefully for her, there came the ringing command:

"Stand by all to strip the schooner of sail."

"The storm is upon us!"

The order was quickly obeyed, but not an instant too soon, as the gale came tearing over the sea.

The stanch pirate vessel met the shock

bravely, and every man on board gave a sigh of relief as she went flying along with the gale, feeling that the white schooner could not surely keep them in view in that blow.

Not a light was visible on board, and under mainsail reefed down and fore stay-sail the schooner tore through the seas like a mad racer.

After driving along for several leagues her course was changed and she ran with the wind abeam.

This course was held for an hour and then she began to beat into the teeth of the gale.

"I guess we've dropped her this time, Captain Conrado," said Officer Moralez, gleefully, after several hours had passed.

"You don't think we sunk her, Moralez?"

"I at first thought so, senor."

"She certainly disappeared most mysteriously."

"Yes, senor."

"Yet I heard no crashing of timbers."

"Nor I, senor."

"She could hardly have taken in sail so quickly."

"We would have seen her had she done so."

"Hardly, if stripped to bare poles."

"True, senor, and I confess I do not understand it."

"Nor I, for the mystery deepens."

"Suppose we see her in the morning, senor?"

"Then I shall begin to believe with the men that the white schooner is haunting us."

"And I."

Forward among the men the white schooner was the general topic of conversation.

The men were at a loss to understand what had become of the strange craft under the fire of the schooner.

They could not believe that she had sunk, and yet they hoped that burning powder at her, bold as it had been, had driven off their spectral pursuer.

The more they talked the more mystified they got, and the more superstitious of the lot became almost terrified at the thought of again seeing the craft that haunted them.

So deep was the impression upon all that the men fairly started with alarm when the lookout shouted in his ringing voice:

"Sail ho!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DOUBLY FOILED.

THE startling cry of the lookout caused a thrill to run through the brave heart of Conrado, as well as it did through his men.

Was the sail the white schooner again?

If so, he felt there was little doubt but she was a specter craft.

Turning to the lookout he cried:

"Whereaway, my man?"

His voice was perfectly calm, but it was with a great effort of his will that he did not show his dread in his tones.

"Ahead, sir, to leeward and only half a mile away."

"I see her!" cried Conrado, leveling his glass upon the stranger.

The storm had blown itself out; but the sea was rough and the wind blew very strong, sending the schooner along at a rapid rate.

The faces of the men would have revealed their anxiety had it not been dark.

"It's a brig, lads, and may be the Vestal, as the two craft sailed together from Spain," said Conrado, anxious to relieve the minds of his men about the white schooner.

After a long look at the stranger Captain Conrado continued, addressing his lieutenant:

"Moralez, that brig is Spanish, from her rig as well as I can make out, and she's about where the Vestal should be, for though fleetier than the Tycoon, as the captain of that vessel said, she might have pressed on rapidly, waiting only to show her speed if chased."

"She sails well, and we will run down closer and keep near her."

"They see us, senor."

"Yes, and are putting on what more canvas they dare."

"We can also stand more."

An order was then given to shake two reefs out of the mainsail and to set the fore-sail reefed close.

This was done and the increased canvas caused the schooner to walk up rapidly upon the brig.

More sail was spread upon the latter, but she did not bear it well, though she was still driven under it.

In the excitement of clearing the rig all on board the pirate craft forgot about the white schooner.

Nearer and nearer the buccaneer drew up on the chase, until all could see with the naked eye that the brig was a large vessel, a good deal like the Tycoon which they had overhauled.

"It must be the Vestal," said Moralez.

"I am sure of it," and we will keep near her until the sea runs down and then board."

"A rich haul of booty will repay us for the scare the white schooner gave us."

Soon after Conrado gave orders for his helmsman to let the craft fall off, and at the speed at which she was sailing this would bring her within hailing distance of the chase within half an hour.

The night was dark, there was a haze upon the waters, but the sea was rapidly running down, and within an hour would be smooth enough to board the brig in the boats.

Within that time the pirate had crept up on, and fallen off toward the brig to be within hailing distance.

The bows of the two vessels were almost together, and they were little over a length apart, the schooner fairly blanketing the brig.

"Ho the brig!" shouted Conrado.

"Ahoy the schooner!" came back in Spanish.

"What brig is that?"

"The Spanish brig, Vestal."

The crew of the schooner gave a shout of joy, and Conrado gave the order:

"Lay to for me to board you!"

"What schooner is that?"

"The Buccaneer Conrado!"

Excited voices and cries were heard upon the brig.

They had evidently supposed on board of her that the schooner was a Spanish cruiser.

"Lay to, or I'll give you a broadside!" shouted Conrado.

"Ay, ay," came in gruff tones, and the order followed to stand by.

The schooner swept up into the wind as the brig did and the two vessels lay to not a cable's length apart.

Then came the order from the buccaneer chief to lower away two boats, and for them to be filled with men armed to the teeth.

The leading boat carried Conrado himself, and in a short while he sprang upon the brig's deck followed by his men.

"Who commands here?" he asked sternly, gazing upon the two-score people on deck, for their were a number of passengers and naval officers in the uniform of the Spanish army.

"I command the brig," said a tall man stepping forward and his voice was stern and morose.

"This vessel is the Vestal?"

"Yes, senor."

"From Spain?"

"She is."

"Bound to Havana?"

"Yes."

"She is a sister ship of the Tycoon."

"True, but there is considerable difference between the two vessels."

"Yours is the fleetest?"

"You are mistaken, senor, the Tycoon is the swiftest vessel."

"You have a rich cargo, of wines, silks, laces and other things?"

"You are mistaken, senor."

"I am not."

"The Tycoon carries such a cargo as you name."

"And your cargo?"

"Munitions of war, for the forts and troops in Cuba, Senor Pirate."

"What?" cried Conrado in surprise.

"It is just as I say, senor."

"You carry much else?"

"No, senor."

"Only the munitions of war?"

"That is all."

"And the Tycoon?"

"Carries the rich cargo, as she is far faster than my vessel."

"Curamba!"

The captain of the Vestal fairly started at the emphasis put on the Spanish oath.

"Well, señor?" he asked.

"I wish to search your vessel."

"Do so, señor."

"I overhauled the Tycoon."

"Ah! she was robbed then?"

"No, for I did not board her, hailing from my deck, and her captain told me that he was loaded with the munitions of war, and that your vessel carried the valuable cargo, the Vestal being the faster sailer."

The Spaniard laughed, while he said:

"That was a clever *ruse* of the captain's, to escape."

"Curse him! I will yet bring him to task for this deception; but, now that I am on board your vessel, I will search her."

"Do so, señor."

"Whom have you on board?"

"Several Spanish officers, señor, commanding troops in Cuba, and who are returning to their commands; that is all, señor."

"There is ransom money in them, then; but I will first see if you tell the truth about your cargo, and if not, beware!"

He seized a lantern as he spoke, and calling to half of his men to accompany him, began the search of the hold.

It took him but a short while to convince himself that the captain had spoken the truth; his brig was laden only with munitions of war.

"That devilish skipper of the Tycoon played a clever *ruse* on me; but I will make him repent it, if ever I cross his path again."

"Now to make those Spanish officers pay ransom money."

So saying, Conrado returned on deck.

As he did so a wild cry was heard from his schooner, and he saw, what had before escaped him, the many sails and hull of the white schooner, standing down toward the two vessels.

"Into your boats, men!"

He almost shrieked the words, and the boats' crews lost no time in obeying.

Back to the schooner they pulled in great haste.

But they had not gone far before Captain Conrado called out:

"Ho! where is Jessop, lads?"

Jessop was a man who had gone in the boat with them on board the brig.

He had not returned, or at least was not in that boat.

"Ho, that boat!" shouted Captain Conrado.

"Ay, ay, chief," was the response.

"Is Jessop in your boat?"

"No, señor."

"He has gone, then, deserted us, and but for that white schooner's coming, I would return and hang him to the yard-arm for this act of his."

For a moment Conrado seemed as though about to put back for the man.

But he saw that the temper of the men would not stand it, and so hastened on to his vessel.

It took but a few instants to bring the boats at the davits and get the schooner under way, and away she darted before the wind, and keeping the brig, which still lay to, between himself and the white schooner.

Away sped the pirate craft, and all on board gave a sigh of relief when they saw that their spectral pursuer was not keeping close in their wake, as upon former occasions.

"I believe she has run down to the brig, señor, for that vessel is still lying to."

"Yes, Moralez; but my glass fails to discover her."

"I cannot fathom the mystery, and I believe I am as anxious now as the men to give her a wide berth," and Captain Conrado was sorely troubled at thus being haunted at sea by a spectral craft.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PIRATE DESERTER.

WHEN the captain of the Spanish brig Vestal saw the captain and crew of the pirate schooner so hastily depart from his vessel, he knew the reason; for, with his men glancing to windward they had already discovered the

white schooner where the buccaneer had not done so.

He had made his men keep silent about the strange white craft, as had the crew of the Tycoon before them, hoping that it might prove to be a cruiser to create a diversion in his favor.

When the pirates hastened off he laughed at their alarm.

Then he enjoyed a laugh at the manner in which his brother captain of the Tycoon had cleverly deceived the buccaneers by telling them that his vessel was carrying munitions of war as freight.

But he soon turned his attention to the white schooner, when he saw that Conrado's vessel was in full flight.

He saw that his men were growing anxious as they gazed upon the weird-looking craft.

The brig still lay to, and from the manner in which the white schooner came down upon them, the Spanish skipper knew that to take to flight would do no good, for he would be quickly overhauled.

"We'll soon know what he is," he said to an officer of the Spanish Army, who wore the rank of a colonel upon his uniform.

"Yes, and I hope we will not make the discovery to our sorrow," replied the officer.

As he spoke, several of the crew of the brig came aft, bringing with them a man whom they had tight hold of.

"Well, lads, what have you there?" asked the captain.

"A pirate, señor," answered the spokesman, and all on board the brig were at once deeply interested.

"A pirate?"

"Yes, señor."

"Where did you get him?"

"In the hold, señor, where he was hiding."

The Spanish captain gazed at the man.

He was a darkly-bronzed sailor, with compact form and a face that was reckless in the extreme, though by no means vicious.

"Speak, sir, and say who you are and what you are doing here?"

"I'm a pirate, señor, as the lads said, but it was from necessity, for I was captured on a merchant craft long ago and forced to serve Captain Conrado or go to the yard-arm."

"I see."

"I love life, Señor Captain, so I chose a berth on the buccaneer schooner, determined to escape when I could."

"And you have done so?"

"Yes, señor, I hid when the captain was searching the hold, and hearing my mates depart I was coming out to report to you when these lads saw me and grappled me at once."

"Well, my man, you tell a straight story; but I'll talk to you after awhile, when I know the nature of this craft coming down upon us."

The captain glanced toward the white schooner as he spoke, and following his looks the pirate deserter uttered a startled cry, as he also saw the weird craft.

"What is it, sir?" sternly asked the Spaniard.

"The white schooner, señor."

"So I see."

"But she is a specter, señor."

"Not a bit of it."

"Oh, yes, señor, she is a spirit craft that has haunted us for days and nights."

"Look how the schooner is flying from her—see, she is almost out of sight, when, if Captain Conrado had not seen the white schooner, he would have robbed your vessel and perhaps set her on fire, holding you and passengers for ransom."

"And the white schooner you say has haunted you for days?"

"Yes, señor, for we could not shake her off by day or night."

"I fear, señor, she means your vessel harm, for see, she is coming down as though to board you."

"It does seem so, but for all that the craft is no phantom, my man."

"But we will soon know what she wants, and then I will look to your case."

The captain now turned to the white schooner, which was now but a short distance off.

The crew of the brig were anxious; for they could not solve the mystery of the strange craft.

They saw that her hull and spars were snowy white, her canvas shone like burnished silver and her crew, dressed in white, moved about the deck in a weird, ghostly sort of manner.

A few more moments and the white schooner was within easy hail.

Then the Spanish captain was preparing himself to hail, when stern, sharp and clear came across the waters:

"Ho the brig!"

"Ay, ay, schooner ahoy!" was the response of the Spaniard.

"What craft is that, where from, where bound?"

"The Vestal, Spanish, and bound to Havana."

"I will board you!" came the response, and in a few moments a boat left the side of the white schooner, which had come to, and pulled toward the brig.

The captain met his visitor at the gangway.

He saw that the boat was white, the oars also, and the men were dressed in snowy sailor suits, and skull-caps to match, the only color being a red band grasping a rope of gold, evidently intended to represent a hangman's noose.

The officer who boarded was a man whose face and form would anywhere attract attention, and his eyes seemed to fairly look into one's heart, the Spanish captain thought.

He was also dressed in white, trimmed with gold braid and brass buttons, and wore a cap on which was the same device as upon the caps of his men.

"Señor, were you robbed by yonder pirate?" he asked quietly, as the Spaniard met him, and he spoke in perfect Spanish.

"No, señor, thanks to your coming so opportunely I was not."

"I am glad that I was near, for yonder craft is commanded by Conrado the Corsair and he would have shown no mercy."

"He seemed to greatly fear your vessel, señor, for when she was sighted they hastened away with the greatest speed."

"They deem your craft a specter of the sea."

The strange commander smiled and said:

"I intended that they should so believe, for I shall haunt Conrado wherever he goes, and prevent his doing more harm than he has."

"Are you an American commander, may I ask, señor?" asked the Spaniard with considerable curiosity.

"I am not an American, señor; for my cruiser flies not the stars and stripes, as you see."

"My flag is my own, a black field and a red band grasping a hangman's noose in the center."

The Spaniard started, while he asked uneasily:

"A black field, señor?"

"Yes, for such is my fancy."

"If it is well to fight the devil with fire, it is equally so to fight a pirate under his own colors, for I am a cruiser after buccaneers alone, Señor Captain; but I will not detain you more, for yonder is my game," and he pointed in the direction of the schooner of Conrado.

"Let me tell you, señor, that one of the pirate crew is now on my vessel."

"Ha! did you catch him?"

"No, señor, he hid when his chief was searching the hold, to see the nature of my cargo, and the men found him afterward."

"He claims to have been a prisoner, forced to serve the buccaneer as a seaman."

"It may be so, for such cases are numerous, as I have had reason to know," and the white schooner commander spoke in a manner that impressed the Spaniard with the belief that his thoughts were in the past.

"I believe his story myself, señor," returned the Spaniard.

"Captain, I wish you to let me have this man?"

"I hope not to harm him, señor, as he sought protection with me."

"No, I will do him no harm; but I must have him."

"I can but obey, Señor Captain."

"Where is he?"

"Yonder he stands," and the Spaniard called the pirate deserter to come to him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AGAIN IN THE PIRATE'S WAKE.

THE pirate deserter advanced toward the Spanish captain, and the commander of the strange schooner, with the air of a man in great dread of he knew not what.

He was an Englishman, with a face of ordinary intelligence, and the look of one who believed thoroughly in the supernatural.

He saluted the Spaniard and doffed his tarpaulin to the schooner's commander.

"My man, I learn that you deserted from the schooner of Conrado the Corsair," said the stranger.

"I did, sir, I did."

"You are sure that you were not told to remain on board this brig for any spying purposes, and to join your vessel elsewhere?"

"Oh Lord, no, sir," and the man was fairly frightened.

"Why did you leave them?"

"It's said, sir, that rats desert a sinking ship, and I felt that the schooner was doomed, for have you not haunted us, sir, like an evil spirit, by day and by night?"

"I tell you, sir, the men on board the schooner are almost wild with fear, for they don't believe you or your vessel real, as I now see you, but specters of the ocean, sir."

"That is why I hid away when we were in the hold and stayed on the brig."

"You are not a pirate from choice then?"

"Lord love you, no indeed, sir."

"I was taken prisoner by Conrado, and to save my life joined the crew, intending to desert when I got the chance."

"What is your name, my man?"

"Jessop."

"Jessop?"

"Yes, sir, William Jessop, from Cowes, England, at your service, sir."

"Well, my man, I wish you to go with me."

"It isn't in your face to harm me, sir."

"Not if you do your duty by me."

"I'll do it, sir; but I suppose your schooner's all right."

"A better sea boat never rode out a gale, and she's as fleet as the wind," said the captain of the white schooner with pardonable pride in his vessel.

"She's all that, sir, no doubt; but I wanted to know how *real* she is."

"If I had returned the fire of Conrado you would quickly have discovered that point."

"She is real enough, as your chief will yet discover."

"But now I wish you to return with me."

"I'll do it, sir, for I'm at your mercy," and the man's face showed his dread, though he could not see a way to escape, and so accepted the situation.

"Go into my boat alongside and I will follow you, for I wish to again be in the wake of the schooner."

"She's out of sight, sir," and the man glanced over the sea.

"I will find her," was the confident reply, and again congratulating the Spanish captain upon his escape from Conrado, the commander of the white schooner returned to his vessel, the pirate deserter accompanying him and eagerly scanning the beautiful craft as they approached it in the boat.

"Get under way, Mr. Mordecai, and follow in the wake of the pirate," he said, as he stepped on board.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the officer addressed, and at once the white schooner swung off to the wind, while the man aloft was hailed with:

"Ho, aloft."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Where is the schooner."

"She has changed her course, sir, and is heading to windward, sir, on the starboard tack about six points off our port bow as we now head."

"Ay, ay, tell us when we are heading for her," and the officer at once gave orders to the helmsman.

The white schooner's course was changed, and she shot by the brig like an arrow, a cheer from the Spanish crew greeting her.

After a short distance had been covered, the lookout hailed:

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ay, ay!"

"The schooner now points so as to cross the pirate's wake."

"Ay, ay, keep me informed if any change is needed."

"Ay, ay, sir."

During this conversation between the officer of the deck and the lookout aloft, the captain of the white schooner had halted near the companionway, as though to hear all that was said.

The pirate deserter was standing near, alarmed, and very uneasy.

He too listened most attentively to all that had passed between the deck and aloft, and, looking out over the black waters, he wondered how the pirate vessel could be kept in sight.

He was still of the opinion that there was something supernatural about the white schooner.

"Come, my man."

The captain spoke to the pirate deserter and started toward the cabin; but, as he did so the man aloft hailed and he again stopped.

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ay, ay, aloft!"

"The schooner has suddenly stripped to bare poles and is lying still."

"She hopes to dodge us, Mordecai, not knowing that we now have our eyes upon her."

"Yes, captain, as she is too far off to see the brig or the schooner and must conclude that she too is out of sight."

How they could see the schooner the pirate deserter wondered, and he felt more than ever convinced that there was something canny about the white craft and her strange crew.

For a little the schooner held on as she was, except that she was pointing directly toward the pirate.

But, ere she sailed a mile the lookout again hailed:

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ho, aloft!"

"The pirate knows that we see him, sir, and is again setting sail to fly."

"Ay, ay."

Then turning to the helmsman the officer gave him orders how to head, and the captain went on to the cabin, again calling to the pirate deserter to follow him.

He was obeyed; but it was with fear and trembling that William Jessop entered the cabin of the white schooner, and he almost wished himself again on board the craft of Captain Conrado, for, as he muttered to himself:

"I know that she is not a spook craft, and I am sure there's something wrong about this one."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN ALLY.

WHEN he entered the cabin of the white schooner William Jessop, the pirate deserter, glanced about him curiously.

The contrast from the white deck and sails was striking, for within the cabin all was coloring, and softened so as to please the eye.

The vessel had evidently been furnished with an eye to taste and luxury.

Seating himself in an easy-chair by the table, under the glare of the cabin lamp, the captain told the pirate deserter to take a seat not far away, where he could note every feature of his face.

"Well, my man, do you still think my vessel a phantom?"

"I do not understand it all, sir, for she's curious to me," was the reply.

"When did you go on board the pirate schooner?"

"Over a year ago, sir."

"Where were you captured?"

"I wasn't really captured, sir, for I was on board a brig as seaman, and was sent on board the pirate at his order."

"What brig was it?"

"The Golden Hope, out of Boston, sir, and in the West Indian trade."

"Who was her commander?"

"Captain Bob Brent, sir."

"What had she to do with the pirate?"

"You see, sir, Captain Bob Brent was in the habit of meeting the pirate at sea and taking on board his booty to carry it into Boston and sell it."

"I was one of the crew of the Golden Hope, as I said, sir, and was sent from her to the pirate, but did not wish to go; but I had no chance to get out of it."

"Were you on the pirate schooner when an attack was made on her in boats, at her hiding-place on the coast of Maine?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was thought that Captain Conrado was killed then?"

"Yes, sir."

"He fell like a shot, for a bullet glanced upon his head; but he soon came round all right."

"And again took to piracy?"

"Worse than ever, sir."

"He was prepared for that attack?"

"Yes, sir, for a man he had trusted, coxswain of his gig, had been reported killed in Boston, where the captain had gone for a few days with a boat's crew."

"The captain didn't believe the man was dead, for he has an awful suspicious nature, so he hastened back to the schooner and set a watch."

"The vessel that came to attack us hove in sight before dark, and the man who had reported that the coxswain was killed, the captain forced to jump off the cliff, for he confessed to having been bribed by Coxswain Rodriguez to tell that he had been killed. So the captain was ready for them and we beat them back."

"Several dead men were left on your deck, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, for a few followed their leader, who was as brave a man as I ever saw."

"And he was killed?"

"We thought so, sir, but he was not."

"My God!" and the schooner's commander sprung to his feet, startling the pirate deserter who also arose quickly.

"Do you mean this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lieutenant Basil Brent was not killed?"

"No, sir, he was several times wounded, and it was thought for months that he would die."

"And he recovered?"

"Well, sir, he was in a fair way to recover when we left the island."

"What island?"

"The retreat of Captain Conrado."

"Ah, yes, among the Bahamas?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was getting well you say?"

"He was, sir."

"When was this?"

"Three months ago, sir."

"You saw him then?"

"No, sir, but the captain went ashore, and the men left on the island told he was recovering."

"Was this the last time the schooner was at the island?"

"Yes, sir."

"She does not go often?"

"No, sir, from three to four times a year; but last time she only stopped a few hours."

"And you left the lieutenant there?"

"Yes, sir; but Captain Conrado intended to return for him soon, I believe."

"For what reason?"

"Well, sir, he was as kind to the lieutenant as a brother could have been, and he offered the surgeon and nurses a big sum to save his life, and they do say that he intends to take him back to his home again, when he goes there on this cruise."

"By Heaven! but if Conrado does this he has a heart."

"He is not a bad man at heart, sir, and there's not one of the crew that does not like him."

"He was born a gentleman, you see, sir, and something, nobody knows, what, drove him to the bad."

"I never knew him to insult a lady, sir, or to rob one, but he is death on any one who fights him weapon for weapon, and he's true as steel to them he likes."

"You give him a good character for a pirate."

"He deserves it, sir."

"Well, my man, tell me if you remember this island retreat well?"

"I do, sir."

"And the approach to it?"

"The channel's a dangerous one, sir, but I think I could run it."

"By night?"

"It would have to be a pretty calm night,

sir, and moonlight, so I could get my bearings."

"Are you willing to attempt it?"

"In this schooner?"

"Yes."

"If you order me to do so, sir."

"I do so order you; but remember, a mistake on your part, the touching of the keel, the grazing of a rock and you die."

"I would rather, sir, lead the boats there, for by night I am not so sure of the channel, though by day I could make it."

"There are not more than a score of people on the island?"

"Less than thirty, sir."

"And there are but two guns to guard the channel?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are a thirty and an eighteen pounder."

"You seem well posted, sir."

"A lookout is kept upon the hilltop?"

"Yes, sir."

"But I suppose by night he is generally asleep?"

"Yes, sir, I guess he is, for there's little to watch for, as a vessel does not pass near the island but once in a great while."

"You know the people there?"

"Yes, sir, for I was wounded and left there for four months once, and then it was I figured out the channel."

"Most of those there are wounded?"

"Yes, sir, or have been; but enough able-bodied men are there to man the two guns, and there is a little fort full of small-arms, where a score of men could keep sheltered and resist a boat attack."

"Well, my man, we will go to the island retreat of Conrado, and you will be our pilot," coolly said the captain of the white schooner.

CHAPTER XL

UNMASKED.

THE more that William Jessop saw of the commander of the mysterious white schooner, the more he was at his ease.

He respected the man and yet felt a certain awe of him.

As he had said his heart had not been in piracy.

He had shipped on the brig of Captain Robert Brent as an honest seaman.

Then he had been tempted by gold to keep quiet regarding the smuggling operations the commander of the Golden Hope indulged in.

Next came the sale of piratical booty, and more gold to keep silent.

Then came the regular meetings with the schooner of Conrado and the transfer of treasure and loot, and Jessop began to feel that he was accumulating quite a snug sum for himself.

Next he was ordered on board the buccaneer craft and from that day found himself a pirate.

But the determination was strong in his heart to desert when he could do so.

He had been terribly alarmed by the haunting of the pirate vessel by the white schooner, and so had decided to try and remain on board the brig when they boarded her.

With all his savings in gems and gold tied about his waist, he had been ready to make the attempt, and so had hidden in the hold of the *Vestal*.

Now that he found himself on board the terrible white schooner he had lost his awe of her, as he was sure there was nothing supernatural about her.

He hated to betray the islanders, but self-preservation was first to be looked to, and so he decided to serve the captain faithfully and said so.

"You are wise, my man, and you shall not go unrewarded, if you serve me well, as I believe you will."

"Thank you, sir."

"I will now tell you that I believe your story to be true."

"Indeed it is, sir."

"I said that I knew it to be the truth that you have told me."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you wish to know how I am aware of it?"

"I cannot guess."

"Did you ever see me before?"

"Somehow I think so, sir, but I do not know when or where, sir."

"Look me straight in the face."

"Yes, sir, but I cannot recall you."

"What kind of a man was it who deserted from the captain's boat in Boston?"

"He was a Cuban, sir, but spoke English like a native, and was tall and well-formed."

"He wore a beard, did he not?"

"Yes, sir, a long black beard, and his hair was quite long also."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he a rough fellow?"

"Ah, no, sir, but on the contrary looked like he had been brought up a gentleman."

"Well, Mr. William Jessop, *I was the coxswain of the pirate gig*," said the captain of the white schooner, calmly.

The seaman was on his feet in an instant.

"You are Coxswain Rodriguez, sir, for I see it now," he said in amazement.

"I was Coxswain Rodriguez, Jessop; but I am now Captain Rafael Rodriguez of the Cuban schooner, *Ocean Phantom*. I fly my own flag, a black field with a red hand grasping a hangman's noose, for I am *pirate-hunting*, Jessop."

"But I have protection papers from the Captain-General of Cuba, with liberty to hoist the Spanish flag at will for protection against foreign cruisers. I have as fleet a vessel as floats, four-score brave sailors, a splendid battery, and, as I said, I am pirate hunting," and Captain Rodriguez smiled.

"I am glad to see you again, sir, I assure you, and I always thought there was something suspicious about you."

"There is more than you can dream of, my man; but I am on the track of Conrado now and I shall run him down in good time though what you said regarding his kindness to Lieutenant Basil Brent is in his favor."

"I found him all you have said; but, for what he was in the past, the lieutenant of Belmont the Buccaneer, I hate him."

"As for yourself, you can have a berth on board and shall share as my other men do, and you will act as pilot when I need you."

"The time I was on the schooner of Conrado she did not put into the island retreat, so I knew not where to find it, or how to get into the harborage if I could find it. You are, therefore, just the man I want."

"I will do my whole duty by you, sir; but, as I said, we can approach by night, anchor, and go ashore in the boats with muffled oars."

"It would be best."

"The next day I can bring the schooner in, for the place will be in your possession."

"We will do that, and head for there at once, for I wish to see if Lieutenant Brent is still alive."

"I do not think it can be otherwise, sir, for he was out of danger when we were last there."

"Well, we will head for Conrado's retreat."

"And the schooner?"

"Ah, we will let him go for the present, for we can find him."

"You certainly have followed him in a most mysterious way, sir."

Captain Rodriguez smiled and said:

"I will let you into the secret of that mystery."

"Thank you, sir."

"I have on board the pirate craft two men in my pay, and they manage to always keep a bull's-eye lantern turned toward my vessel. Whether aloft, or when below, they get a chance in some way to show a light, not seen on the deck, but flashed over the water toward us, and my lookouts are lashed in the rigging aloft, each having the strongest glasses that are manufactured, and thus we have kept the schooner in sight when otherwise we could never have done so."

"Then, too, I have guessed at his tricks to dodge us and have been fortunate in finding them out every time."

Jessop gave a deep sigh of relief at this explanation of what had seemed supernatural powers on the part of the crew of the white schooner, and he said:

"Well, sir, you have frightened the pirates half out of their wits, and though he does not show it, Captain Conrado is also alarmed."

Rafael Rodriguez laughed lightly, as

though he felt sweet revenge in the awe he caused others to feel.

Then Jessop said:

"May I ask, sir, how it was that you disappeared after our broadsides the other night?"

"My men are experts in handling sails, and all works so well on my vessel, that we dropped our canvas almost in an instant."

"Swinging around as was your schooner she fired wildly, and we were not hurt, while under bare poles we could not be seen."

Another sigh of relief came from the seaman's lips.

The white schooner was a matter of fact to him now.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE NIGHT EXPEDITION.

IT was just sunset when the *Ocean Phantom*, as Rafael Rodriguez called his beautiful white schooner, came in sight at the island that William Jessop said was the retreat of Conrado.

The deserter, dressed in the white uniform of the crew of the *Ocean Phantom*, had been aloft for some hours on the lookout.

The topmasts had been housed, so that they would not be seen from the island, and no sail had been set aloft.

Other islands had been sighted and passed during the day, which was pleasant and with only a fair breeze blowing.

At last, just as the sun neared the horizon Jessop hailed the deck.

"Ay, ay," responded Captain Rodriguez.

"Come aloft, if you please sir, for there is land ho!"

"All right," and taking his glass Rafael Rodriguez ascended to a perch by the side of the seaman.

"There is the island, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir, for I know its outline well."

"You see it distinctly relieved against the setting sun."

"Yes, and we cannot be seen off here in the shadow."

"No, sir."

Rodriguez leveled his glass at it and asked:

"Did you ever note any peculiarity about its outline when relieved against a bright sky?"

"Yes, sir, often, when I have been off in my boat fishing at sunset, during my stay on the island."

"What was the peculiarity you noticed?"

"That it was exactly the shape of a man's boat lying down."

"You are right, and that is the island."

"There is no mistake about it, sir."

"Well, we can stand on as we are, under shortened sail, and reach an anchorage after midnight."

"Then we will lower the boats, and, under muffled oars go into the harbor."

"Yes, sir."

"You do not think that Captain Conrado could have gotten here ahead of us?"

"I think not, sir, though it was possible, as we have been coming slowly to find the island."

"Yes, he might have run here, after we dropped him the other night, hoping to avoid us."

"It would be well, sir, to take a large force."

"I will, and have the schooner ready to support us, if need be."

Captain Rodriguez then descended to the deck and gave the necessary orders for getting the boats ready with oars muffled.

He was determined to take three boats and fifty men, and the balance were to stand at quarters on the schooner to be ready in case of a retreat, should Conrado be at the island.

Slowly the schooner approached the island, Jessop, from aloft directing the helmsman how to steer until the island was but little over a league away.

Then he descended to the deck and took the helm himself, for he knew that the approach was a perilous one.

Arriving within a mile and a half of the shore the sails were lowered and the schooner came to a standstill.

Then a small anchor was let fall into the sea and drew out six fathoms of chain.

Without the creak of a block, so noiseless-

ly did all work, the crew lowered the three boats.

Then the men, fully armed, went over the side, the pilot going in the gig with the captain and taking his place in the bows.

With reefs and ragged rocks all about them, it was no easy task to follow the channel; but William Jessop had a cool head and he led the way unerringly.

Now and then he ordered the men to cease rowing and glanced about him.

"I am glad we came in the boats, sir," he whispered back to Captain Rodriguez, adding:

"It would have been very hard to have brought the schooner in, light as is the wind, and calm the sea."

"Yes, you are right, and I too am glad we came in the boats," returned Rodriguez in the same low voice in which the pilot had spoken, and he glanced about them at the perils on either side, ahead and astern.

Then again the gig moved slowly forward and the other boats followed in single file astern.

The island loomed up ahead, dark, silent and forbidding.

Were there eyes watching the approaching boats from its dark sides?

The night was starlight, yet dark, and the men could hear the beating of their hearts as they rowed on once more.

The sound of the light surf beating against the rocky island alone broke the stillness, for not a word was spoken, other than now and then in a whisper between the pilot and Rodriguez.

At last the gig rounded a rocky point, and Jessop whispered:

"The heavy guns are mounted up there." They were upon a cliff rising forty feet above the heads of those in the boats.

But no hail came, no sound was heard, and the lookout there was surely asleep, or they were going into a trap.

It was a critical moment; but the gig held on and the other boats followed in order as before.

The channel here was deep and narrow, and the tide was running out, so that the men had to bend to their oars with force.

But still they made no splash, no sound.

Another point was here turned, and the harbor was before them.

It was a small haven, deep, and well protected, though difficult of access.

Upon a rise of land upon the other shore was a mound which Jessop whispered was the little fort, and the heavy guns also commanded the harbor.

There were half a dozen vessels in the harbor, and Jessop eagerly eyed them to see if one was the pirate schooner.

He knew well what would follow if Conrado was there.

He knew that they had already been seen if the chief was there, as a night watch would have been kept, and that between the fort and the battery the boats would be visited with a terrific fire.

The chances had been greatly against them, for the entrance was dangerous, and more, Conrado might have been there, in which case the pirates would fight with the desperation of despair.

"Shall we land, sir?" he whispered.

"Yes," was the low reply, and the gig headed for the beach, the other boats, now on either side of her, moving all together.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN POSSESSION.

THE landing was made in silence, and Jessop led the way toward the little fort.

It was surrounded quietly, and this convinced Rodriguez that they had not been discovered coming into the harbor.

Every man gave a sigh of relief, for the tension was great up to that moment, all feeling as though they were standing over a magazine that might explode at any moment.

"I will go to the battery, sir, and capture the guard there, for he's doubtless asleep, or he would have seen us," whispered Jessop.

"I will accompany you," was the whispered reply, and calling to two seamen to accompany them, Rafael Rodriguez walked off by the side of the pilot.

The path led around the ridge to the battery, which was several hundred yards distant.

But no one was met with, and the point was reached without an alarm.

"Wait here, sir, for if the guard is there he will be asleep under shelter of the gun."

The pilot then walked forward, while Rodriguez and the two seamen waited.

They saw him advance to the gun and bend over.

"Ho, mate, you take it coolly and the captain in port," said Jessop.

The man, awakened from a sound sleep sprung from his bed and gazed at the speaker.

By the starlight he recognized him and said in a trembling voice:

"Oh, Jessop! it is you?"

"Yes."

"And the captain is here?"

"He is."

"And I asleep?"

"So it seems."

"I did not see the schooner come in."

"Where were your eyes, man?"

"I only went to sleep a few minutes ago."

"Nonsense, you have been asleep since dark."

"Come, the captain wants you."

"He'll kill me."

"Maybe not, but come."

The man obeyed and the next moment found the grip of the two seamen upon him, while the pistol of the pilot was leveled in his face.

"Give up, Mate Royston, for you are caught."

"What! the island captured?"

"Yes, and this gentleman wishes to have a talk with you," and at his words Rafael Rodriguez stepped forward.

"Yes, I wish to ask you some questions, and if you value life you must reply correctly," were the stern words of Rafael Rodriguez.

"Mercy, senor, for I will tell you all you would know," and the man showed abject fear.

"The schooner of Conrado is not at the island?"

"No, senor."

"When was it here last?"

"Months ago, senor."

"Is there a prisoner here?"

"There are a number, senor, sent in two weeks ago on a Cuban coaster to be kept for ransom."

"Ah! can you tell me if there is an American naval officer held here as a prisoner?"

"There is an American naval officer here, but he is to be released, the captain said, for he is his friend."

"He is wounded?"

"He was badly wounded, senor, but is about well now."

"He nearly died though, and but for the best of nursing would have done so."

"Who was his nurse?"

"I was, senor, most of the time."

"That goes in your favor."

"It is Lieutenant Basil Brent that I refer to."

"That's his name, senor."

"Where is he now?"

"At his quarters on the hill yonder."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir, for no one has had to stay there since he got well."

"And the ransom prisoners?"

"Are down in the Captive Cabin where the people live."

"How many captives are there?"

"Seven."

"All men?"

"Yes, sir, and Spanish officers."

"How many people have you on the island?"

"About forty all told."

"Well, my man, I wish you to lead me to the quarters of Lieutenant Brent."

"Yes, sir."

"Can you do so without arousing the people?"

"I guess so, sir."

"Beware not to prove treacherous."

"I will not, sir, for I don't care to die."

"I will go with you, Captain Rodriguez," said the pilot, and he added:

"Let one man guard him and the other go and bring half the crew up here, while the rest remain in the fort."

"A good idea," replied Rodriguez, and he gave the orders accordingly, while he walked off with the pilot.

Acquainted thoroughly with the ground, Jessop led the captain by a way that avoided the cabins of the pirates, and soon came to the little grove in which was the hut where had so long dwelt Basil Brent, suffering untold agony from his wounds, and yet, by the orders of Conrado, most kindly treated and tenderly nursed.

The door and window of the little cabin were open, and the pirate knocked lightly.

"Who is there?" came in a deep voice from within.

"A friend to see you, Lieutenant Brent," replied the pilot.

Basil Brent knew that, in spite of the friendship of Conrado for him, there were those on the island who hated him, and would gladly have seen him die.

So he did not know but that this was some one who sought to assassinate him, as he had been warned to be ever on his guard against foes, and he said:

"Tell me who you are?"

"Senor, I am here to rescue, for my men are secretly in possession of the island."

"My companion is one of Conrado's crew who has been my pilot and friend," and Rafael Rodriguez stepped to the door of the cabin just as Basil Brent came out and confronted him.

"Senor, I crave your pardon; but I live among those who would gladly kill me, as one who has been their untiring foe for years, and now is befriended by their chief," and the wounded officer offered his hand which Rodriguez warmly grasped.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN A TRAP.

"LIEUTENANT BRENT, as I told you, I am in possession of this island, having come in with fifty men in my boats, while my schooner lies in the offing, so I do not believe when dawn comes the pirates will be desperate enough to resist us, as I believe their fighting force is but half my own."

"Still, if you can suggest what is best, I will feel obliged," and Rafael Rodriguez awaited the reply of the American officer with deep interest.

"I think you have already done all that is necessary, senor, for I suppose you have your men in the fort?"

"Yes."

"And in the battery?"

"There also, senor."

"You might let me have a few here at my quarters, and from the three points we could command the cabins so that it would be madness for the pirates to resist, and there are some whom I would not see harmed, as they have been most kind to me."

"Jessop, go to the battery and bring back with you eight men."

"Yes, senor," and the pilot departed, while Lieutenant Brent asked:

"Where is Conrado?"

"At sea, senor, cruising for gold."

"I left him but a few days ago."

"He is a strange fellow, and I regret that such a man has become the pirate that he is."

"Yes, as I do; but you do not recognize me, Senor Brent."

"Have we met before?"

"Yes, senor, I saw you fall upon the pirate's deck."

"No! were you on the schooner?"

"I was pilot of your expedition, senor."

"Ha! the coxswain who deserted from the schooner of Conrado?"

"The same, senor."

"Rodriguez, was your name, I believe?"

"It is Rafael Rodriguez, Senor Brent."

"How strange that now you lead an expedition against this island."

"You recall what prompted me before, senor, to pilot you to attack Conrado?"

"Gold, my brother said, I think."

"He lied, senor! it was not for gold, but for revenge," and Rafael Rodriguez fairly startled the American officer with his vehemence.

The lie told by Bob Brent, that he had served him for gold, aroused his nature from its inmost depths, and he continued in a low, quivering voice:

"I say, senor, that your brother lied to you in what he said, for I acted from revenge and not for gold."

"There was one man who brought upon

me untold sufferings, for he stole from me my wife and my child, and put me in irons.

"In irons I would have died had not a kind fate guided the wreck, on which I was left to go down to the bottom of the sea in, to an island.

"Ah, what did I not suffer in freeing myself from those accursed irons, and in escaping from that island.

"At last I escaped, and half-dead, was picked up at sea, and borne to far-away China.

"But I did not despair, but started home, was captured by a corsair in the Mediterranean, and sold into desert slavery in Morocco.

"Oh, Senor Brent, for long, long years I was the slave of a cruel master.

"But I did not despair, I would not die, and again I escaped and at last reached my home.

"It was almost a ruin, and I almost forgotten in the years that had passed, while my wife was dead, and my child dead, to me.

"Do you wonder that I vowed vengeance against the man who had wronged me?

"But he, too, was dead, hanged at the yard-arm for piracy, thank God!

"But his lieutenant still lived, and still cursed the sea with his black flag.

"I was revengeful, and so I sought to hang him to the rope's end, he and his crew.

"I shipped on board his vessel in New Orleans, having there saved his life; but I saved him to destroy him.

"Then it was I deserted and went as pilot to your expedition, believing Conrado's end was at hand.

"We were whipped off, you were left for dead on the pirate's deck, and I believed that I had killed Conrado, for I saw him fall at my shot.

"But I found that he lived, and more, I found that there was a devilish plot on hand to destroy the innocent that the guilty might live and flourish.

"I at once determined to thwart the evil-doers, and, with large wealth at my command, I forgot the sorrows of my past, and am working for the good of others.

"With a fine vessel and brave crew, I have been on a cruise to hunt down Conrado, and of late have haunted him at sea like an evil spirit.

"Chance threw into my way the man Jessop, who has been my pilot, and from him I learned that you yet lived, and so I came here to rescue you, and I will bear you to your home, senor, and my word for it, all will be well for you."

Basil Brent listened to the earnest words of the Cuban with deepest interest, and he felt drawn toward him by the strongest ties of friendly feeling.

Holding out his hand, he grasped that of the Cuban, and said with feeling:

"Senor, from my heart I feel for you in all that you have suffered, and time alone will prove my gratitude to you for what you have done for me."

"Ah, senor, there is more to tell you; but not now, not now.

"Here come my men, so when the dawn comes we will have the pirates in our very grasp."

The men came up as he spoke, and the pilot quickly placed them in position, and while he went back to the battery on the cliff to take command there, Rafael Rodriguez returned to the party at the little fort, leaving Basil Brent in charge of the squad at his own quarters.

Then a silence fell upon all, while they waited for the coming of dawn, which would show to the sleeping pirates that they were in a trap.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LYING IN WAIT.

So out of the way of the course of vessels was the island retreat of Conrado the Corsair, that it was an exception to see a craft from the little haven of the buccaneers.

Then the approach, as has been said, was dangerous, and those dwelling there had not the remotest idea that a vessel would find them out.

Should a cruiser scent out the retreat, the pirates felt sure of her not coming in without a pilot, and even if she did the two heavy guns on the cliff could damage her

badly, while it would be hard for her to land her crew under a hot fire from the fort, where there were kept hundreds of small-arms ready for use.

Under such circumstances it is not to be wondered at that the buccaneers grew reckless about keeping a close watch.

As a form a man was kept day and night in the fort on the cliff, and he built for himself a shelter from the sun and rain.

Here the others were wont to sit by day and play cards, and at night the man on duty was wont to crawl into his shelter and sleep the night through.

Such had the one done whom Jessop had surprised there.

The others of the pirates were wont to lock the prisoners in their cabin and then retire; but Lieutenant Brent had never been so treated and he was left to himself up in the chief's quarters when he was on the island.

The pirates therefore were all slumbering composedly, little dreaming of the surprise in store for them.

With the breaking of dawn an early riser or two came out of the cabin, and in a half sleepy way glanced about him.

"Ho, my man, this island is in the possession of a cruiser's men, so surrender!"

The words broke upon the crisp morning air, and were spoken by Rafael Rodriguez, who showed himself to the astonished eyes of the two or three early risers.

With yells of terror the pirates fled back into their cabins and aroused their comrades, and all was at once excitement.

From the windows and doors of their cabins the buccaneers could see that their fort, battery and chief's headquarters were in possession of armed men.

But how many they could not tell.

How they got to the island was another mystery, and the frightened outlaws had no time to consider.

"Ho, buccaneers, will you surrender?"

The question was asked by Rafael Rodriguez.

In their consternation no immediate reply was given.

They had only a few small-arms, kept in the cabin and they were consulting as to what was best to be done.

A dozen of their number were cripples, from wounds received, and they had only about a score of fighting men.

Their foes seemed far more numerous.

Noting the delay Rodriguez called out:

"Ho the battery!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came faintly back from Jessop.

"Train your eighteen-pounder on the cabins and fire a shot over them!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

In the confusion the buccaneers had not heard the order to Jessop, and they were wildly discussing the situation when the eighteen-pounder thundered forth its warning.

The shot went shrieking close over the cabins, and buried itself in the hill beyond.

A yell of terror arose in a chorus from the pirates.

The shot told them that their foes, whoever they were, would not stand trifling.

"Ho, buccaneers!"

"Ay, ay," returned a voice, from the cabin door.

"Will you surrender?"

"On what terms?"

"I offer none."

"Come and take us then."

"Ho, Jessop!"

"Ay, ay, Senor Captain."

"Throw a shot into the nearest cabin."

"Ay, ay, sir."

A moment after the iron shot went crashing into the cabin.

Then came the crashing of timbers and the shrieks of wounded men following the roar of the gun, and out of the cabin dashed a dozen men with their hands raised and crying loudly for mercy.

"Do you surrender?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"All of you?"

"Yes, senor."

"March up here in line."

The order was quickly obeyed, some score of men forming in line, while others, the cripples and those wounded by the recent shot, huddled together in a group outside of the cabins.

In a very few minutes the buccaneers were in irons, those who were able-bodied, the others were under guard and the wounded cared for by the surgeon of the Ocean Phantom.

Jessop then went out in a boat and brought the schooner slowly into the harbor, and Rafael Rodriguez began to reap the fruits of his victory.

There were half a dozen vessels in the basin, prizes of the buccaneers, but three of these only were worth sending to port.

These were loaded with the accumulated booty of the buccaneers, and on board of them were placed the prisoners and prize crews to run them to Havana.

Officer Mordecai went in charge, with orders to turn the vessels and booty over as prizes of the Ocean Phantom, and then put to sea with his men to meet the schooner at a given point, at a certain time.

Then the Ocean Phantom was anchored in the harbor in a certain way to be of service in case of a fight, the battery on the cliff was manned and the little fort also, the reason for these warlike preparations being that Rafael Rodriguez, after a talk with some of the pirates, had reason to believe that the schooner of Conrado was daily expected at the island.

"If he comes in by day or night we will have him in our power," said Rafael Rodriguez, addressing Basil Brent, whom he had asked to act as his first officer in the absence of Mordecai, and who was glad to render what service he could, for his health was now restored almost completely.

But days passed away, and the buccaneer chief did not appear.

At last, as he must sail to meet Mordecai at the appointed time, Rafael Rodriguez ordered the men on board the schooner, got the anchor up, and with Jessop at the helm stood away from the pirates' retreat, while Basil Brent stood upon the deck watching with strange feelings the place where he had nearly died and had passed so many weeks of sorrow and suffering.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TRUTH REVEALED.

THE Ocean Phantom arrived at the rendezvous on time, the vessel bearing Mordecai and his men having just gotten there.

A crew had been shipped in Havana to carry the craft back, so all the men joined the Ocean Phantom which at once headed away on a northerly course.

It was now the intention of Rafael Rodriguez, after finding Basil Brent alive, to capture Conrado's vessel, wherever he might find him.

Before that he had taken pleasure in haunting him; but knowing that Basil Brent was considered dead by Norma Sprague and his friends in G—, he was anxious to return him to his home, and so headed northward.

Upon the return of Mordecai, the lieutenant would have yielded his place as first officer, but both Captain Rodriguez and Mordecai urged him to still aid them, and he was glad to do so.

One night, as the schooner was bowling along with a light breeze, and Mordecai had the deck, Captain Rodriguez and Basil Brent were in the cabin together.

At last, after some time spent in ordinary conversation, Rafael Rodriguez said:

"Senor Brent, I told you when we were on the island that I had not told you all of what had occurred."

"I so recall that you did, sir."

"Is there more to hear?"

"There is, much more."

"Ah! and in what respect?"

"I fear I must give you pain, sir, deep pain—"

"One moment, Captain Rodriguez."

"Yes, senor."

"Have you been to my home?"

"I have, sir."

"Do you know aught of my life?"

"All."

"And that I was betrothed to a lovely maiden in G—?"

"I do, sir."

"You say that you will tell me that which will pain me deeply."

"May I ask if harm has befallen her?"

"No, senor, Miss Sprague is well, I believe, or was when I left, though she mourned deeply for your supposed death."

"Then, senor, I am ready to hear all that you have to say, so that it is no ill to her, for she is my all in this world, and, but for the hope of seeing her again I fear I would have given up many times."

"You will see her, senor, before very long, I hope."

"But now to what I have to tell you, and I hope you will answer me frankly, and pardon me if I appear curious and offend at times."

Basil Brent bowed, but he looked surprised and wondered what it was that the Cuban had to tell him.

"Senor, you have a brother, I believe?"

"Yes, one whom I have looked upon as such, though he is but a step-brother, but supposed to be a half-brother."

"Robert Brent, by name."

"You know that, senor, as he it was who secured your services as pilot when we went to attack Conrado on the Maine Coast."

"May I ask how your father's will read?"

"He really left no will."

"Then you inherited his fortune?"

"Yes, but I wished to share it with my brother."

"And he?"

"Has lived at the home so long he really believed I would never want it, and so considered it as his."

"You are engaged to Miss Sprague, I believe?"

"I was when I sailed from home."

"Was not your brother once engaged to her?"

"No, though it was so believed."

"He saved her life, rescued her from a burning house one night, and so thought he had a claim upon her; but he had never sought her in marriage, claiming her pretty much as he did Overlook Manor, I believe, and Basil Brent smiled."

"Did she love him?"

"No, though she respected him, and might have wedded him some day but for my coming."

"As for myself I did not know that Bob loved her, so told her of my love and received her pledge that she would become my wife."

"Afterward I knew how matters stood, and when I went on that expedition I asked her to pledge me her word that if I was killed she would marry Bob."

"Senor, do you know if she has done so?"

"She has not; but she will keep her pledge to do so should you not return."

"I am glad to hear you say that she is still unmarried."

"She was when I left port last."

"And Bob?"

"Is off on a cruise in his brig."

"Poor fellow."

"May I ask, Senor Brent, if your brother had other means than what he made from his voyages?"

"Not that I know of; but he was remarkably successful in his voyages and told me he had accumulated a large sum; in fact he offered me a good price for Overlook Manor, but I cared not to sell it."

"And, senor, do you know aught of Commodore Sprague?"

"Only that he is a gallant old gentleman, and lost his leg in his battle with Belmont the Buccaneer."

"He is considered very rich, is he not?"

"Yes, I think so, for he owns that fine property of Beacon Hill."

"He seems devoted to his daughter?"

"He does indeed."

"Did you ever know his wife?"

"Yes, and a beautiful woman she was as I remember her, for I was a youth then."

The Cuban's head was bowed for an instant and then he said in a low tone:

"Senor, I have suffered so much of pain in my life, that I hate to give pain to others; but it is my duty to reveal the truth to you."

"Do you know how your brother made his money?"

"By successful voyages and safe speculations."

"You are mistaken, senor."

"What do you mean?"

"He made it in a different way."

"And that way?"

"Do not get angry when I tell you he began by smuggling."

"Impossible!"

"It is true, senor."

"Can you prove this?"

"I can."

"Do so."

"There dwells in Boston, at odd times, a person believed to be a rich southern planter."

"He is known as Conrad, and he lives in elegant style in rooms when he is in port."

"He was once the lieutenant of Belmont the Buccaneer, and after the death of his chief gave up piracy and tried to live an honest life."

"He went to the home of his sister, who had married a southern planter."

"She was dead and her husband was dying of consumption."

"Little dreaming what Conrado had been, this brother-in-law left him his fortune, and he began to believe he would never do another wrong act."

"But he was found out by some of his old crew and had to give up his home."

"With dread of justice he turned to a life of crime again."

"He began as a smuggler, and on its proceeds lived well in Boston."

"One night at a social club he met your brother, and they had a game of cards together."

"Captain Bob Brent lost his all and mortgaged your home, thus placing himself in the power of Conrado."

"Then, to get gold, he sold himself to Conrado and brought in smuggled goods and sold them to him."

"Conrado got avaricious and turned pirate once more, and your brother met him at sea and bought in his booty and sold it as he had the smuggled goods."

"And you can prove all this?" asked Basil Brent in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, and far more."

"More?"

"Listen."

"I am all attention, senor."

"Pray proceed, for your story grows of deepest interest."

"At last, Senor Brent, Captain Robert Brent found himself wholly in the power of the pirate, and he was plotting to shake loose from him in some way, when lo! you appeared at your old home on leave."

"He welcomed you, but in his heart he hated you."

"Then came your engagement to Miss Norma Sprague."

"It nearly stunned him, for he had believed her as his own."

"He went up to Boston and he lost his brig and more in a game with Conrado, and the vessel was to be delivered on the next voyage to the chief."

"Bob Brent was desperate, and just then I went to him, for I knew all."

"I told him how the schooner could be seized, and he engaged to find a vessel and crew to take her."

"He got the vessel and a splendid crew of young men, and he urged you to take command."

"You did so, and the vessel set sail."

"Bob Brent left, off Boston and went ashore for me."

"I returned with him and we headed for the hiding-place of Conrado's schooner, I acting as pilot."

"Then I discovered the double game that Bob Brent was playing."

"He would have you capture Conrado, and thus rid himself of that dangerous foe and thus save his vessel."

"And more, he would have you die, thus leaving the field clear for him to get Norma Sprague and her fortune."

"By Heaven! Senor Rodriguez, you will have to prove every word you utter, or answer to me!"

"Be calm, senor, for I am telling you only the truth."

"I have worked hard, plotted, planned, spied, been an eavesdropper, hired men, good and bad, and spent thousands to get to the bottom of this mystery, and I have done so, I pledge you my word, so hear me to the end."

"I will do so, for something tells me to trust you in everything," was the reply of Basil Brent, and he was deeply moved as he uttered the words.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FOREWARNED.

"SENOR BRENT," continued Rafael Rodriguez, "I have told you something of the story of my life; but there is more to tell and I am not talking at random."

"Time was when I decided to let the dead past bury its dead, and go to my home and submit in silent sorrow to my cruel fate."

"But that time has passed and I am aroused now to do all I can for the future."

"Your brother did plot, as I say."

"He sought to rid himself of a dangerous foe, Conrado, by killing him, or getting him killed, and he determined to get rid of you, his rival, at the same time."

"He did not wish to be known in the matter, as you recall."

"He hung back and pushed you to the front, and he remained in charge of the brig while you led the boats to the attack."

"Did he not?"

"He did."

"He did not wish Conrado to see him, for if taken, and not killed, the pirate could tell ugly stories."

"True."

"He wished you to lead, and decided that you must die."

"He was not sure of that."

"Oh, yes."

"I do not see how."

"He was determined that you should die."

"I cannot understand how."

"Well, senor, he mistook me for a common hireling, and he paid me to kill Conrado."

"Ah!"

"And more."

"Well?"

"He paid me to kill you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Oh, yes, for, playing a part, I cared not to betray myself by refusing to take gold, but told him I acted against Conrado from revenge."

"I went with you in the boat, I boarded the schooner by your side."

"I remember that you did."

"Conrado I fired upon when I saw that we were beaten back, and, as I am a dead shot and aimed at his head, I supposed that I had killed him."

"You I would not have fired on for any sum, as you can well understand."

"But you were wounded, beaten down by the devils who rushed upon you, and I sprung back into the boat and escaped."

"I told your brother that you were dead, that Conrado was dead, and he was happy, and made me dispatch a war-vessel from Boston to capture the schooner, that all the crew might hang."

"I landed in Boston, while he went on to tell his sad story in G—and in his heart rejoice that all had gone well for him."

"I went to the rooms of Conrado and began my work."

"Papers, a locket and ring that I needed, I took, for I wished to use them."

"Then it was, in disguise I went to G—for some days and found out all that I could about your brother, and what he meant to do."

"I saw that it was his intention to make Norma Sprague keep her pledge to you that she would marry him."

"He wanted more money, and when he found that Conrado was not dead, he put to sea on another voyage."

"He dared not disobey his master, Conrado, and he had to keep his promise to meet him as on other occasions."

"So to sea he went, and Conrado went on his cruises once more after blood-money."

"I returned to my home to get gold to carry out my ends, for I have a vast fortune, senor."

"I got my gold, and I built this vessel, armed her and manned her."

"She is under the protection of the Spanish flag, though I sail under colors of my own, as you have seen."

"I have visited Boston, and G—since I have been cruising in her, and I had begun to run Conrado to the end of the rope when I heard that you were yet alive, from Jessop, my pilot."

"I intended also to drive your brother to the wall and save Miss Sprague from a villain."

"Heaven bless you for that, senor."

"You may have noted that I kept one of Conrado's pirates, captured on the island, with me?"

"I did."

"He was a seaman under Belmont the Buccaneer and he recognized me in spite of the years that had passed."

"And more, he told me strange stories, which I wish to have him prove."

"More bad news?"

"Good news I hope for me, senor; but now you have heard all that I have to tell just now, and my place is to take you to your home."

"We can run into the port by night, and you can go to Overlook Manor."

"Your old servants there are in my pay and they will be true to you, for I wish you to remain in hiding until your brother returns from his voyage."

"I will come down there from Boston, in my vessel, claiming to be a wealthy Spanish naval officer with a commission to cruise in my own armed yacht."

"When your brother returns I will shape matters so that all will be well."

"Then I shall go in search of Conrado and find him."

"Such is my plan, Senor Brent, and being forewarned you know just what to do."

"And I will be guided by you, my good friend, in all things, I assure you, for what have you not done for me, what have you not saved Norma from?"

"Senor, when you have seen the end of my plot, you will understand that I have acted for her sake more than all else."

"Wait and see," and Rafael Rodriguez went on deck, leaving Basil Brent to his painful reflections at his brother's Cain-like course toward him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHAT JASPAR REMEMBERED.

NORMA SPRAGUE was under a pledge to marry Bob Brent.

She had pledged her word to her lover to do so, should he be killed, and she meant to keep it.

She could never love again as she had loved Basil Brent; but she owed her life to Robert Brent, and he carried the scars on his hands where he was burned in saving her unscarred from the flames of her burning home.

She admired the handsome fellow and so was content to become his wife, though her heart was with Basil Brent, she believed at the bottom of the sea.

She had so told Robert Brent and he was content, he said, to have it so.

He had gone to sea, and she had promised, when one year was passed, she would become his wife.

The commodore was willing that so it should be, and so matters rested, no outsiders being let into the secret.

The village of G— had recovered from its shock in the death of Basil Brent and other brave spirits who had fallen with him; but all felt now for Norma, for they knew that her love had been no ordinary one.

Among the honored guests at Beacon Hill was the prominent physician of the town, Dr. Roose.

He lived in fine style and was a widower, his lovely wife having died some months after coming to her new home.

It was said by some that she haunted the place by night; but though people vowed that they had heard a woman weeping in the mansion, the doctor laughed at their fears and seemed to have no dread of ghosts, even if one was his wife.

One afternoon Dr. Roose was visiting at Beacon Hill.

He was a good looking man, and people thought he wanted to marry Norma.

Perhaps he did, for he certainly regarded the maiden with loving eyes.

On the afternoon in question the doctor and the commodore were discussing the arrival in port of a strange vessel.

A most beautiful craft, painted white and armed, had dropped anchor in the harbor for an indefinite stay.

She carried the Spanish flag at her peak, the Stars and Stripes fluttered from the fore, and a small flag waved at the mainmast head which people could not decipher; but it had a black field and a red band in the center,

grasping something which appeared very like a rope end.

The craft was said to be an armed yacht, by name the Ocean Phantom, and to belong to a Spanish gentleman of vast wealth who was known as Don Rafael and had a roving commission to cruise at will.

He had engaged the best rooms in the hotel and was looked upon by the villagers with admiring wonder. Several days after his arrival in port a sailor called at the hotel to see the Don.

He was a man who had run away from G— when a boy and gone to sea, and had only returned lately.

His mother was matron at the home of Doctor Roose, and he had been visiting her, coming back to her lonely life like one from the grave.

When he entered the Don's room, for he told the landlord that he had once served under the Spanish captain and wished to see him, he was greeted pleasantly with:

"Well, Jaspas, I am glad to see you."

"I hope you found your mother alive and well?"

"I did, senor, and I have come to see you on important business," replied Jaspas, who was none other than the old pirate whom Rafael Rodriguez had told Basil Brent had recognized him.

The night that the Ocean Phantom had come into port Basil Brent and Jaspas had been landed on the beach near the graveyard, the former to make his way to Overlook Manor to go into hiding, and the latter to look up his mother.

Rodriguez had been glad to have Jaspas ashore to aid him, and not be known as connected with his vessel.

"Well, Jaspas, out with it my man!" said Rafael Rodriguez, who had just finished his supper, and was enjoying a cigar.

"You know, senor, that I am remarkable at remembering faces?"

"I do, for you recognized me after many years, from just having seen me on Belmont's vessel when I was in irons and you brought me my food."

"Senor, you told me of all the misery that Captain Belmont had caused you, and that you came here to find that your wife had married and then died?"

"Yes, Jaspas," said Rodriguez with a sigh.

"Well, senor, I saw the man who captured and hanged Belmont the Buccaneer."

"Commodore Sprague?"

"So they call him, senor."

"Well?"

"I saw him yesterday, senor, and I knew him."

"As the captor of Belmont?"

"And more."

"What more?"

"He commanded a privateer, senor."

"So I know."

"And that is not all."

"What else?"

"He was once a pirate, senor."

"Caramba!"

With the word Rafael Rodriguez was upon his feet.

"It is so, senor."

"Why, Jaspas, you are wrong here."

"No, senor, I am not."

"Commodore Sprague you accuse of being a pirate, the very man who hanged Belmont the Buccaneer?"

"It is so, senor, for he had a commission to hunt pirates, and he was in the habit of capturing richly-freighted vessels when they came in his way."

"But this would have been known, Jaspas?"

"He took good care that it should not be, senor."

"How could he?"

"Dead men tell no tales, it is said, Captain Rodriguez."

"You accuse him of the grave charge of murdering his captives, Jaspas?"

"Senor, he was in the habit of doing so, if he feared trouble, and at other times he boldly hoisted the black flag and pretended to be a real pirate."

"This is fearful."

"It is true."

"How do you know it?"

"I served with him, Captain Rodriguez."

"There can be no mistake?"

"None, sir."

Rafael Rodriguez paced to and fro the room greatly disturbed in mind.

"What a fate for poor Victorine, and her death was a blessing, rather than live to know that after all, believing me dead she had married a pirate."

"Escaped from Belmont the Buccaneer to become the wife of another sea outlaw."

The face of the Cuban was livid, and Jaspas saw that he was most deeply moved, so waited for him to get calm and then said:

"I have more to tell you, senor."

"More?"

"Yes, senor."

"Dare I hear more?"

"It will give you both pain and joy, senor."

"I will hear it!" and Rafael Rodriguez nerved himself to hear what more Jaspas had to tell.

"It can be no more than what I have heard," he said through his shut teeth, and he threw himself down in a chair to listen.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DOCTOR'S SECRET.

WHAT more Jaspas the sailor told Rafael Rodriguez, it certainly had a marked effect upon him.

He rose from his chair while a cry broke from his lips like that of an enraged tiger.

The sweat rolled from his face, and he stood as rigid as a statue gazing at the seaman.

Jaspas was fairly frightened at the manner of his commander.

He did not believe before that the face of man could show such passion.

It was a long time before Rodriguez became calm.

Then he controlled himself with a mighty effort of his wonderful will power, and at once became perfectly calm.

"Jaspas, I thank you," he said.

"You are sure about all this?"

"My mother is housekeeper, sir, and I got it all from her, after telling her what I discovered, as I have told you."

"I shall go there to-night."

"You know best, sir."

"I wish you to leave me now, but be at the gate to meet me, and also await my going in to be on hand should I need you."

"I will, sir."

"Good-night."

Jaspas bowed and departed.

He felt almost awed by the manner of his captain, and muttered:

"I would not stand in that man's shoes for a great deal, for I believe the captain will kill him."

For some time after the sailor left, Rodriguez paced his room in deep thought.

Then he started, walked to a drawea, and took out something which he thrust into his pocket.

Drawing a light outer coat on, he went out of his room.

He walked out of the tavern, politely saluted by all who were congregated in the office, and bent his steps toward a distant part of the town.

Halting at a large gateway, leading into extensive ornamental grounds, he was suddenly confronted by a form.

It was Jaspas.

"You are faithful, my friend."

"Wait outside for me."

He walked on through the grounds to the mansion and ascending the broad steps, raised and let fall the knocker three times.

It was a handsome house, built of brick, large, rambling, and with two stories and an attic.

A servant opened the door.

"I would see Doctor Roose."

He was asked into the library, where the doctor sat, and who rose as his visitor was announced.

"Ah! Don Rafael, I believe."

"I am honored by your visit, sir."

The doctor held forth his hand, but Rafael Rodriguez did not take it.

Instead, he said:

"Are we alone, sir, for I have that to say to you that you may not care to have overheard."

"We are alone, sir; but I will be certain," and the doctor walked out into the hall and called:

"Mrs. Jaspas, see that I am not disturbed by any one."

"Yes, sir," answered a feminine voice from another part of the house.

"Now, sir, how can I serve you, and be seated, please."

"Doctor Roose, you have a prisoner in this house!"

The doctor started and turned pale.

"For years you have kept confined in an uninhabited wing of your mansion an unfortunate person."

"Explain your motive, sir."

The doctor's voice trembled as he replied:

"I have a patient, sir, left in my keeping, a poor lunatic that I have kept hidden from the world."

"Doctor Roose, I came here to force a confession from you, and I will do it."

"I have the power at hand to carry you out of this house where you will never be seen again."

"I have the desire, sir, to hang you to the yard-arm of my vessel, so do not think I will let you trifle with me."

"Out with the truth, sir, or I will force it from you."

"What would you know?" asked the man in a voice hardly audible, for he was completely cowed.

"I would know the secret you hold."

"About the woman?"

"Yes, all."

"What do you know?"

"Enough to hang you, so speak."

"If I do tell you all?"

"Your life is safe, but I promise no more."

"Well, I suppose I must tell you."

"Quick! for I am impatient."

"Do you know who she is?"

"I do."

"Well, I will tell you that I owed money to Commodore Sprague, and he offered to forgive the debt and give me a large sum besides, with this home, if I would poison her."

"I shrunk from doing so, but led him to believe that I would."

"I gave her a powder that caused her to sink into the semblance of death, and I had a weight put into the coffin which I sealed at once, saying that the disease was contagious."

"I brought the lady, unconscious as she was to my home, which I had prepared for her, and secured a nurse to care for her, telling her that she was a lunatic."

"The lady revived and I led her to believe that she had had an attack of brain trouble and was in an asylum."

"The nurse took ill and I got one that I now have, and told her also that the lady was a lunatic, swearing her to secrecy."

"My wife saw her one night and was so frightened that she never recovered from the shock, and died soon after, so I had my punishment, you see."

"But I did all in my power for the poor woman, and her rooms are most comfortable; but I have lived in dread all the time, for people have heard her sing and weeping and say the house is haunted."

"And does Commodore Sprague know that she lives?"

"Some year or so ago, I told him."

"Until then he believed her dead; but I needed money and I forced it from him by telling him I would expose all."

"Several times he has sent her fruit and wines, pretending remorse; but each time I found that he had poisoned what he had sent."

"I did wrong to aid him, but I had not the heart to poison her, and so I brought her here."

"I have told you all, sir."

"Doctor, in that you did not kill her, I will spare you; but I wish you to do for me one thing."

"All in my power."

"Go to her and tell her all; tell her that she was not a lunatic, but that it was a plot of Commodore Sprague to get rid of her in that she must have found out a secret against him."

"Tell her that the man she loved and whose wife she became was not lost at sea as she supposed, but lives and has been searching for her all these years."

"Tell her that she shall never see the man Sprague again, but to go with you to where she will see her real husband."

"You, sir?"

"Yes."

"Your name?"

"Rafael Rodriguez."

"Tell her that where you take her I will come to-morrow and see her."

"Take her with you this night in your carriage and thus lift the load of guilt from your soul."

"Heaven knows that I will be glad to; but then Sprague was not her husband."

"He believed so, as she did, for I was supposed to be lost at sea."

"Break the news to her, as you, being a physician, should know how to do, so as not to turn her brain or break her heart."

"I will, sir; but where shall I take her?"

"To Overlook Manor."

"Ask for Berry and Jule, the old servants there and tell them that I bade you bring a lady there to place in their keeping, and that I will call on the morrow."

"When you have told her all, come to the tavern and let me know if she bore it well, and that you have done as I have asked you to do."

"I will, sir."

"Do this, Doctor Roose, and the secret of your guilt is buried between us."

"Fail me, and by Heaven I will hang you as I would a dog, for I am in deadly earnest."

"I have a man outside who will act as your coachman, so you need not call your servant."

"This is fortunate, as he is away for the night."

"Now, sir, I leave you, and within two hours I shall expect you at the tavern."

"I will be there, sir, without fail, and I thank you for your mercy to me."

"I have not deserved it."

"I am merciful in that you did not kill my wife."

"Good-night," and Rafael Rodriguez left the room and the mansion.

"Jaspar, go to the stables and get his carriage ready."

"Then drive them to Overlook Manor and tell old Berry and Jule I sent you."

"Yes, senor," and Jaspar hastened to obey the orders given him.

Within less than two hours Doctor Roose was ushered into the rooms of the Don at the tavern.

"Well, sir?"

"I have obeyed your bidding, sir."

"She is at Overlook Manor?"

"Yes, sir."

"How took she what you had to tell her?"

"I broke it to her as gently as I could, and she became almost wild with joy."

"She has borne up nobly all these years, and has had hope, she said, to sustain her, that all would come well."

"She is a happy woman now, sir."

"Good-night, Doctor Roose."

"Good-night, senor, and again I ask your forgiveness, for your noble wife forgave me."

"She is more forgiving than I am."

"Good-night, sir."

The doctor bowed and departed; but in his heart he could not blame Rodriguez.

"I have some satisfaction in knowing that old Sprague's time is yet to come," he muttered as he walked homeward, for he had sent his carriage with its strange driver on before him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

BROUGHT FACE TO FACE.

THE village of G—— had cause for gossip the next morning, in that Don Rafael had suddenly discovered that he had a niece in the place.

This niece was none other than beautiful Norma Sprague, whose mother, it was remembered, was a Cuban lady.

The Don was her great-uncle, it was said, and he had sent a note to the commodore which that gentleman had responded to by at once calling at the hotel.

But the Don had gone on board of his vessel, the landlord said, and so the commodore followed him there.

He was received at the gangway and ushered into the cabin.

He seemed a trifle ill at ease, and became more so when Rafael Rodriguez refused to grasp his hand.

"You sent me a letter, sir, in which you said that you were a near relative of my

daughter, and asking me to call and see you."

"I have done so, sir, and you receive me so coldly that I regret that I have made known the circumstance to my friends."

The commodore's manner was almost pompous.

He had at once notified all he had met that the wealthy Don was his daughter's uncle, and he had supposed that he must be a brother of Victorine's father who had found him out.

"Senor Sprague, I wrote to you that I was a near kinsman of Miss Norma Sprague, as she is known, and I am."

"Well, sir, what relation, if not an uncle, the brother of her grandfather Rudolpho, may I ask?"

"Her father, sir!"

"Great God!"

The commodore sat down on the nearest seat.

He nearly fell down in fact.

"Her father?" he gasped.

"I am."

"I thought you were dead."

"I did not die, as you see; but where is my wife?"

"Alas, sir, she is dead."

"You are an infamous liar, Rufus Sprague."

"You tried to have your hireling, Doctor Roose, kill my wife; but he was more merciful than you, and he spared her, devoting her to a life of misery."

"She is now under my protection, sir, and I have work for you to do."

"You are to return to your home, call Norma to you, and tell her that you forced her mother to let her believe that she was your child."

"You are to tell her that her father is not dead, nor her mother either."

"You are to tell her how you sinned against her, her mother and myself, and that I, her real father, was the one who gave her the locket and ring of her mother that day at the grave."

"You are to tell her that I, her real father, will call for her soon to take her to her mother, and then you can go and hang yourself if you wish."

"Because you rescued my wife from Belmont the Buccaneer, I will not hang you, as I would like to do, and would be more tempted to do if you were not an old man and a cripple."

"I will let you live on here, and your conscience can keep you company, for I know you as you are, and your punishment will be great to take Norma from you."

"Tell the people you have so deceived, that you have allowed Norma to return with her uncle to Cuba for a long visit; but when I go, and it will be soon, you will know that I carry with me both my wife and child."

"Now, sir, I have brought you face to face with your crimes, so go and do my bidding, and quickly, unless you wish me to forget all mercy and hang you."

"Be off, sir!"

The man was utterly crushed, and he left the cabin like one walking in his sleep.

But he rallied when he reached the shore and rode home to obey the commands given him.

And obey to the letter he did, telling the grief-stricken Norma all of his crimes, and that her real father lived to claim her, and that the grave over which she had often shed tears was a mockery, for her mother also was alive and would soon clasp her in her arms.

Then Rufus Sprague, broken-hearted, went to his own room and shut himself in to commune with his own thoughts.

An hour after a carriage drove up to the door and from it alighted Rafael Rodriguez.

As he entered the library, Norma sprang into his arms and hid her tear-stained face upon his breast.

Both were too full of joy to give utterance to words until a long time had passed.

Then they talked together in low, earnest tones for an hour or more, after which they left the mansion together and walked over toward Overlook Manor.

Old Berry met them at the door with a happy face and ushered them into the library and Norma found herself in her mother's arms.

When at last she looked up Rafael Rodriguez said with a smile:

"I have another for you to welcome as from the grave, for we talked it over this morning, your mother and I, and thought it best that the greetings should be all over now."

"Have you forgotten that I told you that Lieutenant Basil Brent had not been killed, but was kept as a captive by the pirates?"

"Yes, father, and it seems as though so much joy would kill me."

"First I have a real father, then my mother comes back to me and now you tell me that Basil lives and I will see him soon."

"You shall see him now, for he is here."

"Basil!"

"Yes, señor."

The deep voice came from another room, the firm tread resounded through the hall, and Basil Brent entered the library.

Upon this meeting we let fall the curtain, kind reader, for a scene between lovers thus meeting is sacred.

CHAPTER L.

CONCLUSION.

THE following day the good people of G— were delighted and astounded to see a young man alight from the stage-coach at the tavern, whom a chorus of voices said was Basil Brent.

Many gathered around him, and he soon told his story, of how he had been desperately wounded and held captive by the pirates, who took him to their island retreat where he had remained ever since, until rescued by a cruiser that came to the rendezvous.

His brother he was told was away, but was daily expected home.

But he took up his quarters at the tavern, and soon after was seen wending his way up to Beacon Hill Mansion.

There he found Norma, who knew his little plot to pretend to have just arrived in the village, and the two had a long talk together; but he did not see the commodore, as that personage kept himself in his room, and had not been out of it since his interview with the maiden whose mother he had caused so much sorrow and suffering.

Meeting the "Don," as the people called Rafael Rodriguez, they proved to be old and dear friends, the landlord reported, and they were constantly together for the week longer that the Ocean Phantom remained in port.

Then the cause of her sudden sailing was the fact that Basil Brent received a letter.

It read as follows:

Boston, October 30, 18—.

"BASIL:—

"I came into port to-day, and I was to have gone to G—, but I learned that you were there, and also one Don Rafael Rodriguez, in his armed yacht, the Ocean Phantom, which my friend, Conrado the Corsair, tells me has frightened himself and crew half out of their wits of late at sea."

"The Don I remember as Coxswain Rodriguez, of Conrado's vessel, and as I plotted with him to kill you, thus leaving me to inherit your wealth and your sweetheart, the beautiful Norma, I feel certain that you are aware of my rather bloodthirsty intentions toward you, so I put to sea at once, not caring to meet you."

"As Conrado is hardly aware of my murderous intention regarding him, and I have a superb vessel for a pirate craft, I think he will be willing to league with me and make me his first luff."

"If not, let me impart the secret to you that, having failed in my plots, I turn pirate, and when you hear of Brentwood the Buccaneer, you may know that it is none other than"

"Your loving brother, BOB BRENT."

This letter Basil Brent read over twice carefully, and then handed it to Rafael Rodriguez, who said:

"It is as I expected."

"So let it be; but we had better sail to-night."

"I am willing," was the reply.

And so the Ocean Phantom set sail that night for Cuba, and upon her went Basil Brent, Norma, and her mother, though no one in G— suspected the presence of the latter on board.

The day after the departure of the beautiful vessel Commodore Sprague was found dead in his bed, and Doctor Roose gave it out as heart disease that had killed him; but he knew that it was poison, for Rufus Sprague had taken his own life, as remorse at last had sunk deep into his guilty soul.

Jaspar and Jessop also sailed in the schooner with Captain Rodriguez, and the destination of the craft was Baena Vista Plantation, where, upon arrival, old Cespedes almost went crazed with joy.

Of the after-career of the Ocean Phantom, it was said that she did good service in driving piracy from the Gulf and southern seas, which were cursed by the crimes of two rival ocean outlaws who were known as Conrado and Brentwood the Rival Buccaneers.

Long years after the Ocean Phantom sailed from G— two families came to occupy the deserted homes of Beacon Hill and Overlook Manor, and they were recognized as Don Rafael Rodriguez, who dwelt in the old commodore's mansion with his still beautiful wife, and Captain Basil Brent who came back to his boyhood's home and brought with him his wife, once known as Norma Sprague.

And from those old homes there live to-day descendants who little dream of the strange romance and weird mystery in the past lives of their forefathers, who lived in buccaneering days.

THE END.

Beadle's Half-Dime Library.

BY WM. G. PATTEN.

- 489 The Diamond Sport; or, The Double Face of Red Rock.
519 Captain Mystery; or, Five in One.

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- 306 Neck-Tie Ned; or, The Dug-Out Pards.
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98 William Street, New York.